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# Another City is Possible:
# Mujeres de Maiz, Radical Indigenous Mestizaje and Activist Scholarship

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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by

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ABSTRACT

Another City is Possible:
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This dissertation examines the political and creative practices of Mujeres de Maiz (MdM/Women of the Corn), an Indigenous mestiz@ led feminist of color visual and performing arts collective based in Los Angeles. Since their inception in 1997, Mujeres de Maiz has used politically and spiritually charged art that aims to challenge social injustices, revise dominant cultural representations and build meaningful communities across differences. The research was drawn from a dual method approach: textual analysis and participant observation ethnography with the MdM collective from 2009 to 2014 to examine how urban Indigenous mestiz@s represent themselves in textual and social spaces. Few studies have paid attention to constructions of Chicano indigeneity, and fewer still to feminist indigeneity, in the twenty-first century that exists outside of Chicano nationalist and "Chican@ indigenist" paradigms. In contrast, this work examines the ways women shape, transform and extend Chican@ indigeneity and express manifestations of a "radical indigenous mestizaje" through their artivism. This research seeks to propel Chican@ Studies towards making room for a transnational feminist, hemispheric and grounded approach to indigeneity by demonstrating that these approaches are already being constructed on the ground. The dissertation is comprised of case studies *and* models of activist scholarship.

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## Introduction

> Indigenous like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions. Like an ear of corn—a female seed-bearing organ—the *mestiza* is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads.
>
> —Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands La Frontera*, 103

In *Borderlands La Frontera* poet, philosopher and cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa provides a revolutionary framework for mestiz@ identity construction. Anzaldúa likens the "new mestiza" to corn in order to demonstrate the tenacity and resilience of mestiza women. Putting indigeneity at the center of how we might imagine la mestiza, Anzaldúa explains that her roots are the means of her survival in the Borderlands. The epigraph is a narrative representation of the central concerns of my research. Building on Anzaldúa's cultural allegory, my concern is with how mestiz@s imagine and express indigeneity today and the impacts of historical imaginings.

This project is a continuation of my personal and academic journey to recover, claim, and assert my identity and political commitments as an urban Native woman of mixed Indigenous and mestiza heritages and as a U.S. third world feminist. My academic interest in Indigenous mestiz@ identity politics began in 2003 while I was an undergraduate at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. As a student of Ethnic and Women's Studies I collected and examined the life histories of ten mestiz@s for my senior thesis. My research was driven by two epistemological questions: what does it mean to be an urban Native? How do mestiz@s understand and practice their Indigenous identities? These concerns remain central considerations in my doctoral research.

My personal investment in Indigenous mestiz@ identity politics began long before I was a college student. My people have lived in Los Angeles for three generations. We are of Apache, Mexican and Spanish descent. My entire life I've had a fierce curiosity about the landscape, the buildings, and the people who populate the places that make up L.A. I remember my parents taking my brother and I to various festivals and cultural events in different parts of town (see fig. 1), explaining the

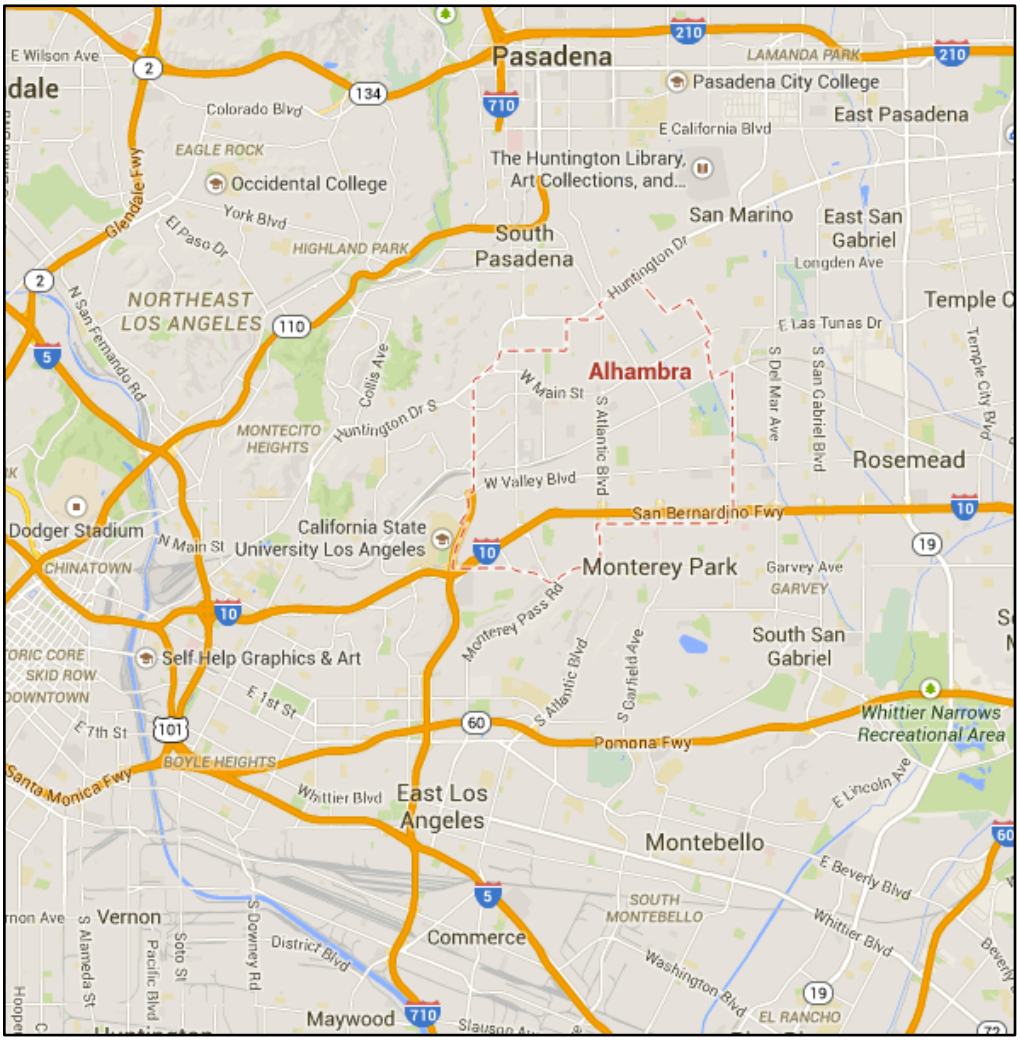


Figure 1. Map of the West San Gabriel Valley and "the Eastside" (various neighborhoods and unincorporated cities in East Los Angeles) where I spent my youth. The area is demarcated to the west by the 110 freeway, to the north by the 210 freeway, to the east by Rosemead Boulevard and to the south by Whittier Boulevard.

significance of certain streets, naming businesses that "used to be there before" or commenting on how long others had been there, and who the owners were. I remember cruising down Valley Boulevard in Alhambra, my hometown, in my father's 1959 midnight blue Volkswagen "bug" to the "Little Tokyo Cherry Blossom Festival" in downtown L.A. every year to watch the dancers and Taiko drummers, meanwhile devouring the best Hawai'ian style shave ice on the mainland. I would marvel at my dad. No matter where we were, it was guaranteed that he would know someone, usually a few people, and they would inevitably spend time catching up and telling stories. My mom and I attended our first powwow when I was a teenager. Being Apache we felt a sense of familiarity and belonging, but as detribalized urban Indians/mestizas we also felt uneasiness with our Indigenous identity. As a kid I remember having the sense that my family was a different kind of "Mexican." We ate different food, practiced different customs and observed different codes of conduct than my other Mexican American friends. It was not until I was fifteen when my mother, grandmother, brother and I took our first trip to New Mexico, our "homeland," that I began to question my heritages, my identity and my destiny.

By the time I arrived at Cal Poly Pomona nearly seven years later, I knew of, or at least I deeply felt, my differently constructed Indigenous and mestiza heritages. This awareness was heightened by my attempts to join a student club. I found M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) to be mostly young mestiz@ men who claimed an ancient Aztec heritage and espoused militant politics (with no room for dissent). I later joined Red Nations Student Alliance (RNSA), an activist student club comprised of Indigenous mestiz@s, mixed heritage urban Indians and Native Mexicans

and South Americans (Yaqui, Zapotec, Kuna) who worked in solidarity with Indigenous communities on various sovereignty-related and humanitarian relief projects on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. Together we explored our identities, women of color feminisms, various spiritual traditions and our connections to Native communities in California and Hawai'i. I have come to realize that my experiences with M.E.Ch.A. and RNSA represent two schools of thought regarding Indigenous mestiz@ identity that I would continue to encounter throughout my personal and academic lives.

I became drawn to urban intertribal and Indigenous mestiz@ events that reflected my personal style and where I felt a shared sense of community. I attended Day of the Dead celebrations, poetry readings, marketplaces and cultural fairs, concerts, car shows and other multi-genre events. In 2004, during my junior year at Cal Poly Pomona, my girlfriends told me about a Live Art Show in Boyle Heights organized by a women's art and performance collective called Mujeres de Maiz (MdM).[1] Each year thereafter my friends would tell me about the amazing things they experienced at the Live Art Show. It was not until five years later, however, during my third year of graduate school at UC Santa Barbara, that I attended my first MdM event. Feelings of self-doubt, isolation and exhaustion weighed heavily on me as I struggled to complete my Master's thesis, and so I didn't hesitate to return to L.A. to "recharge my batteries."

On March 8, 2009 I took the train from Santa Barbara to see the 12th annual MdM Live Art Show, "La Sagrada" or "She, the Sacred" at the Metabolic Studios under the

[1] Women of the Corn. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I italicize and define words and phrases in Spanish (and Nahuatl) in a footnote the first time they appear in the text, with the exception of proper nouns. I don't put an accent on the "i" in maiz (of Mujeres de Maiz) to honor the way it is typically spelled in print. Mujeres de Maiz will be referred to as MdM from this point on, which is a commonly used acronym among its members.

First Street Bridge in Downtown L.A. I arrived late in the evening and missed the opening sunset ceremony offered by all-women Aztec dancers in the nearby community park known as “not a cornfield.” I was disappointed at first thinking that I had missed the ceremonial part of the show, but later realized that the entire event was a ceremony. After paying $10 at the door, I joined approximately 800 audience members. The entrance led to an enclosed art exhibit that featured beautifully adorned altars, vibrant paintings and photographs, and multidimensional installation art, including a life-sized “Mujer de Maiz” made out of corn husks and live flowers (see fig. 2). Films were screening in an

Figure 2. Ramirez, Lilia. *Mujer de Maiz*, mixed media installation, nd.

adjoining room, which I did not see because I was beckoned by the excitement outside. After passing through the art exhibit, I entered the main outdoor area and felt positive energy buzzing all around me. Women artisans were selling items ranging from all-natural hand-made beauty products to culturally infused fashion, jewelry, accessories and books. People were enjoying homemade Mexican food and telling jokes and stories while muralists and graffiti artists collaborated in creating a huge piece on a concrete wall in the background. I was struck by an enormous blue and pink neon-light interactive installation that read: "Another City is Possible" (see fig. 3). Parents watched their

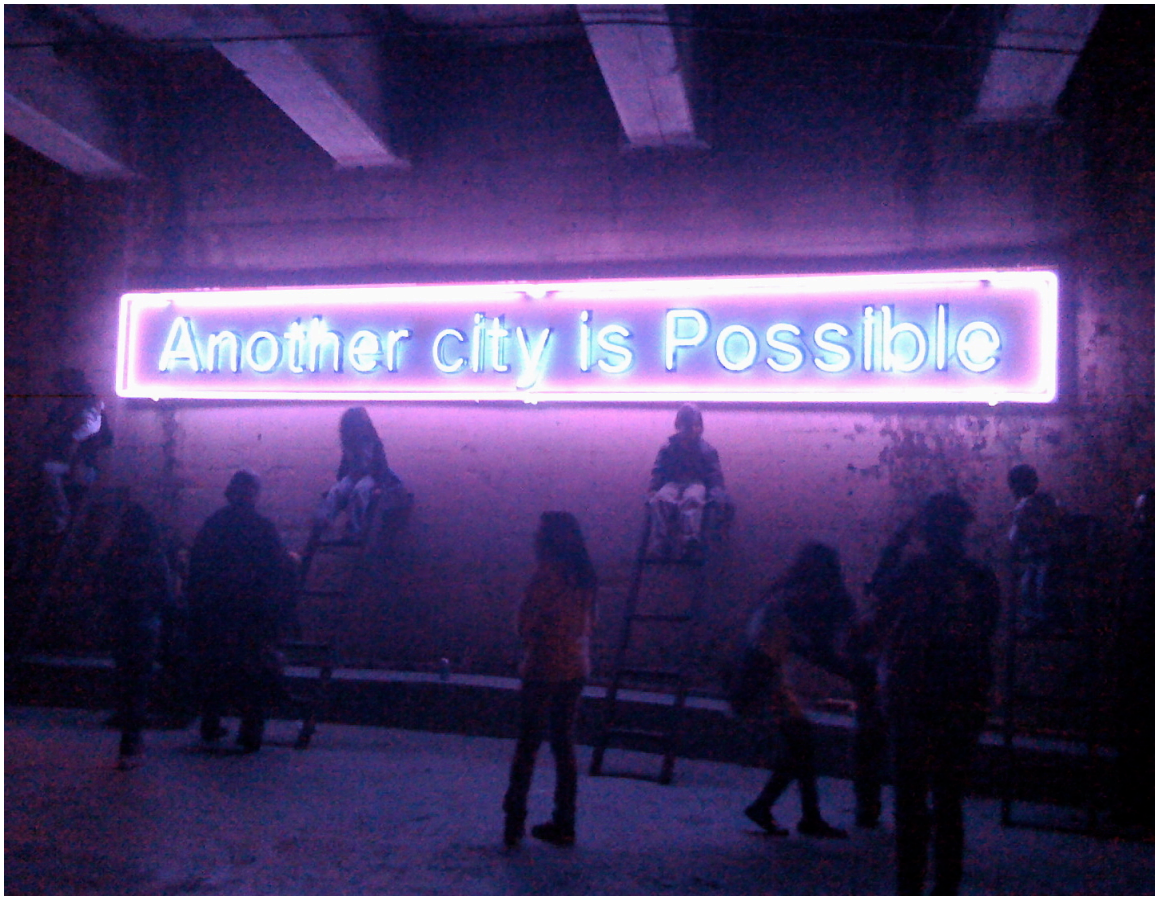


Figure 3. Bon, Lauren and the Metabolic Studio. *Another City is Possible*, nd.

children as they laughed and climbed on four different ladders to sit directly beneath the sign. Others stopped to take pictures of the sign and I thought that they must have been as in awe as I. My observations prompted me to think about the "alter-Native"[2] Los Angeles that I know and love; a city that has a vibrant activist art and music scene, a strong sense of community and people who care for one other. This image that I conjure up is a counter-narrative to dominant stereotypical representations of life in the L.A. barrios.

People of all ages gathered around different stages in anticipation of the electrifying performances by women musicians, poets, storytellers, singers, dancers, emcees, actors and comediennes who performed in rotation in three different areas. A diverse group of women were creating their art side by side, sharing stories in different languages including English, Spanish, Spanglish, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Korean and Indigenous languages, all in the same space. Many of them crossed genre boundaries and mixed artistic styles like Skim, a queer Korean-American hip hop artist, emcee, songwriter and activist from Queens New York who incorporated traditional Korean drumming in their performance. I spent the next few hours trying to absorb the positive energy and various messages and meanings. I shopped, I ate too much, I danced it off, I ran into old friends, I laughed and my heart was full. At that moment I was enamored with the Live Art Show space and what MdM had created. They provided exactly what my spirit needed. Something special happened that night and I could not wait to return the following year.

[2] Cultural theorist Alicia Gaspar de Alba coined the term "alter-Native." She describes it is an approach that "contests the ethnocentric academic practice of categorizing marginalized indigenous cultures as 'subcultures' or objects of discovery" (1998, 10). Specifically speaking of Chican@s, Gaspar de Alba asserts, "Chicano/a culture is not only an 'alter-culture' that simultaneously differs from, is changed by, and changes the dominant culture. It is also "an alter-Native culture—an Other culture native" to this particular geo-historical location that was "once called an outpost of New Spain, then the Mexican North, then the American Southwest, and most contemporarily the Chicano/a homeland of Aztlán" (17). It is important to note that each one of these localized geographical namings are colonial and colonizing.

The next year, I recruited a few girlfriends from UC Santa Barbara to take a road trip with me to attend the 13th annual MdM event, "13-Baktun Return of the Wisdom of the Elders."[3] The Live Art Show took place on March 7, 2010 at The Paramount Ballroom, formerly known as Casa Grande Salon, in Boyle Heights and featured a *mujer mercado* (women's marketplace) and live performances. There were also daytime events which began with a free art walk along First Street with stops at local businesses including Eastside Luv Wine Bar y QUEso and Primera Taza Coffee House. The walk ended with live performances at Mariachi Plaza, named for the musicians who have gathered there since the 1930s in search of landing gigs, whether at restaurants or private parties. The performers included Danza Quetzaliztli, various bands and spoken word poets. My friends and I found a parking spot near the venue and walked to the non-descript building on Avenida César Chávez hoping that the clouds would not bring rain, at least until we made it inside. We saw people we knew standing in line waiting get in and so we chatted with them for a while. A few minutes later, a huge wooden door opened; behind it were two women at a podium collecting the $20 cover. After paying the entrance fee, my friends and I made our way inside to the first floor where women vendors were selling jewelry, clothing, accessories and other crafts. I spent most of my time talking with Dr. Elena Esparza who had a booth with plants, herbs, essential oils, and pamphlets on acupuncture, flower essence healing and holistic wellness.

Around 9:30 p.m. an interior door opened, which led to the second floor main stage. There were a lot of people in a much smaller space than the previous year, leaving

[3] A baktun is 20 katun cycles of the ancient Maya Long Count Calendar. The 2010 Gregorian calendar year fell within the 13th baktun, which was completed on December 21, 2012. This date marked the beginning of the 14th baktun, also known as *Sexto Sol* or Sixth Sun in Nahua cultures. The title of the 2010 event will be explored in detail in Chapter Four.

standing room only for an audience of approximately 400. People filled the aisles and the back of the room to see the featured performance of award-winning Afro-Peruvian singer Susana Baca and her collaboration with Entre Mujeres, a transnational son jarocho women's musical collective based in Veracruz, Mexico and East Los Angeles, California.[4] There were women and children of all ages on stage, singing and dancing and engaging the crowd with call and response. It was an exhilarating performance. Another headlining act was Las Bomberas de la Bahia, an all-women Puerto Rican bomba troupe based in the Bay Area, California. Other performances were shared by individuals and groups including Hermanas Canto Cura (female handdrum duo Cuicani and Adriana), D'Lo (queer Tamil Sri L.A.nkan-American political theater artist/writer, director, comedian and producer from Queens, New York), Happy Frejo (Seminole Pawnee Xicana lyricist, dancer, filmmaker and actress), Indige Femme (musical duo comprised of Tash Terry of the Navajo Nation and Elena Higgins of Maori and Samoan heritage) and Josefina Lopez (Chicana playwright and poet). Collaboration is a distinct and intentional feature of the MdM Live Art Show. Younger or less experienced musicians, singers, poets and actors are often paired with more experienced artists. Cross-genre, inter-ethnic and inter-generational collaborations are fortified through MdM and some of these relationships continue after the Live Art Show. Artists experiment with mixing mediums, languages, aesthetics and identities.

The night was magical. On the way home my friends and I talked about our favorite performances, shared what we bought from the vendors and laughed about

[4] Martha González of the band Quetzal is the founder and leader of Entre Mujeres. The members are: Claudia González-Tenorio (CAVA), Tylana Enomoto (Quetzal), La Marisoul and Gloria Estrada (La Santa Cecilia) and dancers Xochi Flores (Cambalache) and Carolina Sarmiento (Son del Centro). González has participated in the Mujeres de Maiz collective as a performer and mentor since it was created in 1997.

*chismes*.[5] It was during that car ride home that I began to recognize the impact the Live Art Show had on me. MdM brought ancestral ceremonies and expressions into the present, opened them up, and made them accessible to urban women of color and their allies—those interested in egalitarian, liberatory and decolonial lifeways. I felt a sacred connection to the people in that space and understood the cultural expressions beyond their artistic value. For me, they were also political and spiritual. The deep sense of belonging that I felt as a young woman from L.A. was new and it was empowering. It was in that moment that I decided to write about the work of the Mujeres de Maiz collective.

**Research Statement and Research Questions**

Within Chican@ Studies, Indigenous cultural politics are understood to emerge early in the Chicano Movement (1965-1975) and have primarily been examined through representations in cultural production. Some scholars have criticized Chicano indigeneity for being essentialist and heteropatriarchal (Aldama 2001; Anzaldúa 2007; Chabram-Dernersesian 2006; Contreras 2008; Rueda Esquibel 2003), while others recognize its political efficacy (Anaya and Lomeli 1989). Chican@ feminists and cultural critics have complicated constructions of Chican@ indigeneity through new theoretical contributions including: "mestiza consciousness" and "new tribalism" (Anzaldúa 1987; 1995), "queer Aztlán" (Moraga 1992), "Xicanisma" (Castillo 1995), "alter-nativity" (Gaspar de Alba 1998), "hemispheric indigeneity" (Hernández and Varese 1999; Castellanos et. al. 2012) "indígenista politics" (Hernández 2005; Salinas 2006) and "queering mestizaje" (Arrizón 2006). Nevertheless, less attention has been paid to constructions of indigeneity in the twenty-first century that exist outside of Chicano nationalist and "Chican@ indigenism"

[5] Gossip.

paradigms. In contrast, "Another City is Possible: Mujeres de Maiz, Radical Indigenous Mestizaje and Activist Scholarship" examines the ways women shape, transform and express indigeneity and engage in complex processes of identity formation through what I call "radical indigenous mestizaje." This concept is defined in Chapter Two.

The following questions are central to this case study: How do Indigenous mestiz@s (and other women of color) account for their multiple and often contradictory identities and social relationships?; How do Indigenous mestiz@s represent themselves in social and textual spaces?; What are the contemporary political and cultural projects in which Indigenous mestiz@s engage?; and What can the responses to these questions tell us about what it means to be an Indigenous mestiz@ and a feminist of color in the twenty-first century?

Being from L.A., I am acutely aware of dominant (mis)representations of Los Angeles in general and "Indigenous mestiz@" peoples specifically. Rather than list them here, I want to emphasize that this project interrogates assumptions about racialized and gendered spatial locations (Pérez, Guridy & Burgos 2010, 2). My intention is not to romanticize Los Angeles by downplaying violence, criminalization, economic and social marginalization and other material conditions that shape the realities of people who reside there. Instead, I call attention to the cultural practices of "urban Indigenous mestiz@s" and feminists of color in Los Angeles. While it remains important to recover and map historical and contemporary sites of inequality and intersectional oppressions, it is equally crucial to understand the ways in which communities survive, resist and heal these wounds.[6]

[6] Chicana therapist and scholar Yvette Florez-Ortiz said it best: "Some days we look at how we've suffered, some days we look at how we've survived. It's about balance." From "Understanding the Nature

**Terminology**

Applying a universal label to a heterogeneous group of people is tricky, and this is particularly true of mestiz@s in the United States. Thus, a study of a specific ethnic population calls for an explanation of the terminology. There is a dominant understanding in Chican@ studies that a Chican@ is a person of Mexican descent born in the United States. Chican@ is a politicized term, usually associated with a collective history of oppression and resistance connected to a political consciousness with its origins in The Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the fact that Filipinos, Mexican immigrants, Indigenous and Afro-mestiz@s with origins across the hemisphere have identified with the term Chican@ since its emergence, dominant constructions subsume this diversity under the banner "Mexican American." It is imperative to note that hybrid identifications are emerging that fuse Chican@ ethnic and political identity with other ethnic and racial labels such as Chilipina (Chicana and Pilipina), Ticana (Costa Rican and Chicana) BlaXican (Black and Mexican/Xican@) and Apachicana (Apache and Chicana). These hybrid labels indicate a desire for terms that capture the complexities of Indigenous and mestiz@ identities that are not expressed with the label "Chican@." Therefore, I use "Indigenous mestiz@"—a term that intentionally accounts for Indigenous and Native peoples, Afro- Asian- and Indigenous mestiz@s and other mixed race and multi-ethnic peoples who identify with Indigenous political projects of sovereignty, liberation and decoloniality and who emphasize their *Indigenous* heritages as integral to their histories, politics and aesthetics. "Indigenous mestiz@" expresses both a political affinity and an ethnic identity. My research seeks to break away from

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of Trauma from a Feminist Social Justice Perspective," MALCS Summer Institute, Santa Barbara, California, 2012.

dominant Chican@ studies paradigms that rely on nationalist constructions of identity in order to make room for a transnational feminist, hemispheric and grounded approach to indigeneity.

I understand that in most instances individuals prefer to be referred to by a label of their choosing and that they may also reject any label that has been imposed upon them (Zavella 2006). I attempt to honor the way individuals self-identify, whether it is a scholar whose work I cite or the narrator of an interview I collected for this project. Many of my narrators identify as "Xicana," "Indigenous Xicana," or "Xicana Indígena," which warrants an explanation of these terms that are often used interchangeably. La Red Xicana Indígena, which translates in English to The Indigenous Xicana Woman's Network, is a collective of scholar- and community-activists who define themselves as

> a network actively involved in political, educational and cultural work that serves to raise indigenous consciousness among our communities and supports the social justice struggles of people of indigenous American origins North and South. Our name…further signifies our alliance with all Red Nations of the Américas, including nations residing in the North. We are a pueblo made up of many indigenous nations in diaspora who through a five hundred year project of colonization, neocolonization and de-indianization, have been forced economically from their place of origin, many ending up in the United States… [W]e stand with little legal entitlement to our claim as indigenous peoples within America; however, we come together on the belief that, with neither land base nor enrollment card—like so many urban Indians in the North, and so many displaced and undocumented migrants coming from the South, we have the right to "right" ourselves.[7]

The writers of this document further explain that Xicana Indígena politics re-envision "families apart from the Eurocentric model of the privatized patriarchal family," and seek to "draw example from the tribal structure of…indigenous antecedents." Cherríe Moraga

[7] La Red Xicana Indígena "Our Purpose and Intention." http://www.freewebs.com/laredxicanaindigena/ See Anzaldúa's "Speaking Across the Divide" for her perspective on Xicana detribalization.

and Celia Herrera Rodríguez, founders of the network, advocate for raising consciousness of younger generations through alternative and creative learning environments that "closely reflect an indigenous point of view."[8] "Xicana," "Indigenous Xicana," and "Xicana Indígena" are three of the many legitimate expressions of indigeneity that fit within and alongside the category "Indigenous mestiz@."

My use of the technological ending (Indigenous mestiz@) signifies the fluidity of gender and acknowledges a spectrum of identities and expressions rather than a binary (Indigenous mestiza/o) or the cumbersome "Indigenous mestizas and mestizos" when referring to a group. In *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer*, Sandra K. Soto uses the @ as "a conscientious departure from certainty, mastery, and wholeness, while still announcing a politicized collectivity." She argues that the @ "disrupts our desire for intelligibility, our desire for a quick and certain visual register of a gendered body the split second we see or hear the term" (2010, 2-3).

**Organization of the Chapters**

Mine is an empirical study derived primarily from participant observation ethnography with the MdM collective from 2009 to 2014. Accordingly, the dissertation is written as an "autobioethnography" and an "autohistoria-teoría." In *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, Norma Elia Cantú develops a genre of writing that blends (auto)biography and ethnography with fiction and history to produce cohesive stories that are simultaneously fictitious and "truer than true" (1995, xi). Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of "autohistoria-teoría" is a form of autobiographical writing that blends history, myth, memoir, poetry and storytelling with other forms of theorizing in the name of personal and social transformation. In writing this dissertation, I move between first and third

[8] Ibid.

person narrative and utilize a variety of storytelling techniques to intentionally close the distance between researcher/subject/reader. These techniques are examined in Chapter One where I also I introspectively detail the challenges and opportunities of engaging in a participatory community-based research project as an activist-scholar and community organizer.

In Chapter Two I ask "Where is Indigeneity in Chican@ Studies?" I get at this question by examining historical and theoretical constructions of Chican@ indigeneity and mestizaje, how Indigenous mestiz@ feminists and cultural critics have transformed these categories, and the need for new conceptualizations of identity in Chican@ studies. I define "radical indigenous mestizaje" as the theoretical framework I utilize to examine the cultural productions generated by the MdM collective. This theory that emerged for me was "deductively developed from social research"—what social scientists Glaser and Strauss call "grounded theory" (1967, 5). They argue that "generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research" (6).

The study moves to an examination of MdM and the ways the collective constructs and articulates a manifestation a "radical indigenous mestizaje"—a paradigm that Chican@ studies can move towards. Chapter Three provides an introduction to the MdM collective, its history and members, through a biographical profile of three core member-organizers. I conduct a textual analysis of MdM cultural production in two sites: the 2010 anniversary issue literary and arts zine (Chapter Four) and at an MdM fashion show (Chapter Five). In Chapter Five, I return to another enactment of participatory

ethnography and activism. At the end of this chapter I provide an organizing manual as my final contribution to this mode of activist scholarship.

I write from the perspective of an Apachicana born and raised in Los Angeles, as both insider and outsider, and as a participant-witness-observer-aficionada to the cultural productions and practices that are chronicled in this study. As an insider, I don't claim to speak for all mestiz@s or even urban Indigenous mestiz@s from Los Angeles. This dissertation represents one version of the Mujeres de Maiz story. It was an impossible task to include "everything" I observed, participated in, felt and learned. In fact, I continue to learn as I write and as I engage with MdM at varying levels and locales—at academic conferences, in email exchanges and phone calls, on road trips, at celebrations, ceremonies and organizing meetings.[9] It proved difficult to write about a deeply personal and social experience, but this is a story that I take great pride in telling.

[9] In *Interpretive Research Design* Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012) consider this method of continual reflection a part of the intersubjective social processes in qualitative research.

# CHAPTER I

## "Autobioenthnography:" How I Became an Activist-Scholar-Organizer

Engagement in participatory community-based research has allowed me to develop an awareness of my activist-scholar community organizer identities in the fields of Chican@ studies and feminist studies. This awareness emerged during the process of negotiating my identities as an organizer with MdM and as a researcher. In this chapter I weave together different forms of storytelling to introspectively detail the challenges and opportunities of engaging in participatory community-based research. Chicana cultural critic Clara Roman-Odio argues that the 1981 text *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* was groundbreaking because it legitimated storytelling as a transnational feminist methodology. She asserts *This Bridge* produced subjects who became "empowered as language users and knowledge producers." Storytelling methodology was critical because it "allowed US feminists of color to destabilize imposed representations of their experiences and develop a political consciousness" (2014, 22). This chapter intentionally follows in the tradition of radical women of color storytelling methodology.

Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole scholar Donald Fixico describes the power and usefulness of stories in an Indigenous context: "the power of a story is vastly underestimated for its influence on society in general. Local history, sharing news, spreading gossip, and understanding the structure of a community are all involved in the power of story and storytelling" (2008, 26). Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Maori professor of Indigenous education, argues that storytelling can be "a useful and culturally

appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth'" (1999, 145). Storytelling provides me a useful way to reconstruct my distinct individual memories as part of a dynamic social environment. Storytelling is a vehicle to articulate a fuller illustration of Indigenous mestiz@ experiences and offers a horizon of shared possibilities, real or imagined. In this chapter I utilize epistolary techniques, reflexive ethnography, "autobioethnography" developed by Norma Cantú and "autohistoria-teoría" developed by Gloria E. Anzaldúa. Epistolary genre writers use letters, diary entries, journal notes, newspaper clippings, emails and other documents to tell a story. A popular example is Alice Walker's 1982 novel *The Color Purple*, which is written with diary entries and letters. In this chapter I include journal entries, photographs and Mujeres de Maiz promotional materials. Reflexive ethnography is a form of introspective ethnographic writing that actively works to close the distance between researcher and subject. Haitian-American anthropologist Gina A. Uylsse argues that reflexive ethnography is "a new mode of academic activism, which seeks to interrupt the problem of ethnographic authority that arises when the focus in only on the subject" (2007, 6). Reflexive ethnography is a way to write counternarratives to dominant Western academic approaches that would have researchers remain objective and detached. Scholars in the fields of ethnic studies, feminist studies, cultural anthropology and performance studies inform my understanding of this particular form of ethnographic writing.

Anzaldúa describes "autohistoria" as a "fictionalized autobiography or memoir" and "autohistoria-teoría" as a "personal essay that theorizes" (2002a, 578). Her editor, AnaLouise Keating, defines autohistoria-teoría as a "relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection" in the "storytelling process"

(Anzaldúa 2009, 319). Keating says writers who utilize this style "blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing" (Anzaldúa 2009, 319). Women of color use "autohistoria" and "autobioethnography" to intervene in and expand the genre of autobiographical writing by breaking conventional genre boundaries.

I apply criteria outlined by performance studies scholar Richard Schechner to examine my own social roles, identities and behaviors in relationship to the collective "as performance." Schechner asserts that the following questions can be asked of any action or behavior in order to determine its performative qualities: "What is the behavior? What is its sequence? How is it generated? How is it evaluated? What costumes do people wear—or clothes for that matter? Where does the behavior take place? In what circumstances? In what physical environment?" (2012, n.p.) Other questions I asked include: How do people behave in relationship to one another? How is the behavior staged and evaluated? Asking these questions allowed me to self-consciously witness my personal, ethical and emotional experiences in the production of this project.[10]

This story opens with a description of my approach to gaining entry into the MdM community, where I highlight my emphasis on building collaborative research relationships. Felicia Montes, co-founder and coordinating member of MdM, facilitated my affiliation with the collective. The early part of 2011 was a critical time of personal and professional growth as I sought to make sense of my identity as a young scholar working in a community that I care about deeply. Over a nine-week period I immersed myself in the MdM circle, attending seven weekly planning meetings, culminating with

[10] Decolonial theorist and liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval names this activity of witnessing one's own consciousness, one's own "mind-body-emotion matrix," "meta-witnessing."

the 14th annual Live Art Show on Sunday March 6, 2011 at The Casa Grande Ballroom in Boyle Heights. This chapter then moves to a discussion of the difficulties I had with defining my research agenda and my identities in an academic context, theorizing my experience using Gloria Anzaldúa's concepts "the path of conocimiento" and "the Coatlicue state" (2002a; 2002b; 2007). I explain how my emergence from the Coatlicue state resulted from a newfound understanding of my study as a mode of "engaged community work." The story ends with my characterization of engaged community work and offers a blueprint for Indigenous mestiz@ activist-scholars with liberatory goals.

**Venturing Out, Entering the Community**

***Journal Notes***

2010, March. I finally decided on a dissertation topic! The MdM collective. But what exactly will I write about? Explore their website www.mujeresdemaiz.com and Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/mujeres.demaiz to learn about the history of the group and to find out who I should contact to ask permission to take on this project.

2010, April 7-10. Attended the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Conference in Seattle, Washington to meet with MdM members Felicia Montes and Martha González. They organized a performance and panel titled "Mujeres de Maiz: L.A. Artivism Live."

2010, June 19. Attended the "Celebrating Words Festival, Written, Performed, Sung" at Los Angeles Mission College in Sylmar to follow up with Felicia.

2010, December 9. Organized an Indigenous Xicana fashion show and cultural fair in Santa Barbara that featured MdM designers and local artisan vendors.

2011, January to March. Organized the 2011 MdM Live Art Show.

2011, March 6. The 14th annual MdM Live Art Show "Soldadera de Amor" at The Casa Grande Ballroom in Boyle Heights.

2011, March 30–April 2. Participated in a roundtable presentation "Chicana Cultural Activism and Spaces of Belonging" with MdM members at NACCS in Pasadena, California.

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After attending the 2010 Live Art Show as an audience member and deciding to write my thesis about the MdM collective, I thought that a good place to begin my research was to explore the MdM website and Facebook page. I discovered that Felicia Montes is one of the most active members; she seemed to make presentations and perform often. She was scheduled to present and perform at the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) conference on April 7-10, 2010 in Seattle, Washington. Although I had not submitted a proposal to NACCS that year, I decided to go in order to attend the panel "Mujeres de Maiz: L.A. Artivism Live" organized by Felicia and Martha González, lead singer of the band Quetzal, long-time performer and organizer with MdM, and then Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, Seattle. The panel was part spoken word and musical performance and part interactive dialogue. The three people in the audience, myself included, were encouraged to join in singing the chorus and to clap to the beat.

After the performance Felicia and Martha discussed their current creative projects and invited questions from the audience. The panel functioned like an interactive dialogue rather than the standard question and answer period that follows conference paper presentations. At the end of the session I approached Felicia to thank her for sharing her work and to introduce myself. I told her that I was born and raised in Alhambra, that I attended (and loved) the last two Live Art Shows, that my mom was from Boyle Heights where the shows take place, and that I was a graduate student in the Ph.D. program in Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCSB. I took a deep breath, swallowed my nervousness, cleared my throat and said, "I'd really love to write about Mujeres de Maiz and I'd like to know what's the best way for me to ask for permission from the

group?" As someone who has worked with and belonged to different Indigenous and women of color organizations, I am familiar with cultural protocols regarding the delicate nature of negotiating entry into a new community. I was sure to ask for permission and not automatically assume that I could take on this project. I also knew that gaining permission might take time and require me to "show up," that is, to demonstrate through my actions that I was coming to MdM with good intentions. I also knew that there was a possibility that I would not be given permission, which would mean that I would have to change my research topic. Felicia and I spoke for a few minutes. She seemed pleased by my interest in working with MdM and told me that she would talk to the group. She asked me to keep her updated on any developments.

One sweltering hot Saturday in June 2010, I attended the 5th annual "Celebrating Words Festival, Written, Performed, Sung" at Los Angeles Mission College in Sylmar hosted by Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural and Bookstore. Tía Chucha's was founded in 2001 as a creative and educational bookstore, art, performance, and cultural space to serve the community in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. Tía Chucha's, along with the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs presented the one-day, free family event to celebrate and promote literacy and the arts. The festival featured local artisan and food vendors, live musical, theatrical, and spoken word performances, children's activities, a book fair, author readings, community resources, and family literacy workshops. I received the e-flyer for the "Celebrating Words Festival" as I typically do each year (see fig. 4). I did not attend in the past because like many people in L.A., I stay within the boundaries surrounding my home. For me those areas are the West San Gabriel Valley, East L.A. and Downtown. However, I scanned the flyer and noticed that Felicia was


Figure 4. Tía Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore. *5th Annual Celebrating Words Festival: Written, Performed, and Sung flyer*, 2010.

scheduled to perform. Attending the festival was an opportunity for me to provide Felicia with an update about my project. We had not been in contact since NACCS in April. I preferred to speak with her in person rather than via email or an online social network like Facebook because I was invested in developing what sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn calls a personal "relationship of exchange and trust" with Felicia.[11] That was best accomplished face to face.

Tía Chucha's resident Aztec dance group Danza Temachtia Quetzalcoatl presented the opening ceremony. This type of inaugural performance is organized in Indigenous mestiz@ circles as a form of ritualized prayer to give thanks to the Creator and to bless the space and the people at a social gathering. The festival featured ethnically diverse performers, but the majority of performers and audience members were Indigenous mestiz@s. After watching the opening ceremony I walked around the outdoor grassy area in the 100-plus degree heat where the vendors were set up. As I perused the artisan's booths I ran into a few classmates from my alma mater Cal Poly Pomona. We sought relief in the shade and chatted for a while. I noticed Felicia's booth and made my way over.

Felicia was selling clothing, jewelry, handbags, and other handcrafted items from Urban Xic.[12] I browsed the merchandise while she assisted a customer with a purchase. I decided to buy an oversized pink Coyolxauhqui tank top, mint-colored dangly earrings

[11] Chicana sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn advocates "minority researchers" develop "relationships of exchange and trust" when entering "minority communities" to conduct fieldwork (1979, 209). She notes that individual research relationships must be negotiated carefully so that researchers may be accepted into the community.

[12] *Urban Xic* is an online cooperative marketplace that Felicia created with her partner Joel "RageOne" Garcia. *Urban Xic* was created for Los Angeles-based socially conscious artivists, musicians and fashion designers who connect with "Xican@-Indígena" worldviews, that is, the spiritual-politics that call for respect, peace and dignity for all Indigenous peoples, to sell their merchandise.

with an image of Native actor Wes Studi as a Pawnee warrior from the movie *Dances with Wolves*, and an In Lak Ech CD. I handed Felicia my items, we hugged and kissed on the cheek and talked about how school was going and how my dissertation ideas were evolving. Since Felicia and I last spoke I had developed more concrete ideas about my project. I shared with her that I would like to interview MdM organizers and audience members. I was also considering gathering ephemera to create an MdM archive at a university or city library. I asked if that would be something the collective would be interested in. Felicia said MdM wanted to create an archive for some time and she would put me in contact with their documentarian and other members who could help. She also said the core members were excited about my project. After meeting with Felicia at NACCS and at the "Celebrating Words Festival" I felt it was appropriate to continue connecting online while I completed my dissertation proposal. We kept in touch through email and Facebook over the next few months.

Later that year in the fall I designed and taught the class "Indigenous Women Resisting Representation" for the Feminist Studies department at UCSB. Before the quarter began, I met with my friend and fellow cultural activist Gloria Sanchez-Arreola to discuss ways we could collaborate to create a service-learning project for my course. Gloria was in charge of cultural programming at Casa de La Raza, a non-profit Latin@ center on the Eastside of Santa Barbara. She also curated live performances and art exhibits at Del Pueblo Café, her family's Mexican restaurant in nearby Goleta. We decided to organize an "Indigenous women's fashion show and cultural fair" that would also function as my student's final project as well as a fundraiser for Casa de la Raza youth programs. Gloria and I invited Felicia to be the featured clothing designer and Lisa

Rocha, a long-time member of MdM, to be the featured jewelry designer. The fashion show served multiple purposes: 1) my students learned how to curate a fundraiser event; 2) it provided a space for them to connect theory to praxis; and 3) it allowed me to build my relationship with Felicia and MdM by bringing them to my community in Santa Barbara. The fashion show and cultural fair "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion" took place Thursday December 9, 2010 at Casa de La Raza, accommodating an audience of approximately 100 students and community members. Many students shared with me that the event was the most enjoyable educational experience they had at UCSB. Some said they recognized the importance of cultural production, especially art and fashion, in processes of representation. Others connected the show to the theory we had spent the previous ten weeks reading about. The fashion show is discussed in detail in Chapter Five. I mention it here briefly to provide an example of how I developed "relationships of exchange and trust" in engaged community work.

Soon after the fashion show, I invited Felicia and Gloria to submit a proposal with me to participate in a roundtable presentation at the 2011 NACCS conference "Sites of Education for Social Justice" that took place in Pasadena, California on March 30 to April 2. What follows is a revised excerpt from the abstract we submitted:

> In this roundtable Felicia Montes, co-founder of the Los Angeles based Xicana Indígena collective network Mujeres de Maiz (MdM) will discuss the organization and share insights about her work as a cultural activist, artist, poet, performer, and educator. The women of Mujeres de Maiz have been uniting, organizing and creating organically since its inception in 1997. Bound by their creative spirit of using art as an educational tool for resistance, healing, and social change, MdM has become a creative outlet and a cross-cultural inter-generational women's circle. Gloria Sanchez-Arreola will discuss her experiences cultivating a space for the Chicana/o Latina/o community in the predominantly white, upper-middle class neighborhood of Santa Barbara, California. Through her family's efforts, the locally owned Mexican restaurant Del Pueblo Café has become the meeting place for university students and community members to congregate over

> food, art, spoken word and musical performances. Amber Rose González, a senior graduate student at UC Santa Barbara, poet, and educator will discuss how Felicia and Gloria's work and the sites they create are a part of the feminist of color legacy of building bridges and healing through art and performance—what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "spiritual activism." The roundtable will conclude with a discussion of how the presenters collaborated to bridge academia and community through their participation in a community fashion show in Santa Barbara.

The plan was to share our experiences working together in our different capacities as cultural activists, educators, and artists from Southern California. After our proposal was accepted Felicia and I learned that Gloria was not able to participate. We decided to invite visual artist and MdM member Lilia Ramírez to participate in Gloria's place. After each panelist introduced herself, Felicia asked the ten or so audience members to introduce themselves, which helped to create a casual and amicable space.

Before Felicia began her formal presentation she lit sage and placed it in a seashell. She blew on the sage to increase the smoke and moved the shell in a clockwise circle up to the top of her head, down in front of her heart, and across her chest from shoulder to shoulder in the shape of a cross and said a prayer: "I thank the Creator for Mujeres de Maiz, for the ancestors, for all our relations, and for another day of life." Felicia proceeded to share a detailed history of MdM. She discussed the first Live Art Show in 1997 and the cultural, educational, and political projects MdM has worked on since then. She deferred to me in some instances, asking for my input and to support points that she made. I did the same with her during my presentation on "Collaborative Research Relationships and Art-Based Activist Curriculum" using the fashion show as a case study. It was important that our roundtable be interactive between presenters and also with the audience. Felicia, Lilia and I shared our experiences of collaboration and community building and we attempted to also develop a sense of community, however

temporary or facile, in that conference space by demonstrating the way we interact in organizing meetings.

In addition to building relationships of exchange and trust with MdM, I also sought to share my research with my students and with academics, activists and community members in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. It was important for me to make my research accessible by combining elements of academic conference paper presentation, classroom lecture, storytelling, and event curation. The examples described above are a glimpse into my research story and the ways I developed relationships with Felicia and the members of MdM. From January to March 2011 I immersed myself in the MdM circle as an organizer for the 14th annual Live Art Show. I was also present in another role, with another identity as participant-observer to gather dissertation data. I came to find out that my attempts to negotiate the identities "organizer" and "researcher" would challenge me intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

***Seeking Shared Raíces as a Mujer de Maiz***

I drove from Santa Barbara to the Boyle Heights community center Corazón del Pueblo on Monday January 3, 2011 to attend my first Live Art Show planning meeting. I was very excited, but nervous at the same time. I wondered what it would mean to conduct research as a "participant-observer" on this occasion. Felicia was the only MdM member who I had met previously and I was anxious to meet the other members.

As soon as I exited the freeway and turned onto First Street, I felt very nostalgic. I passed Mariachi Plaza, Eastside Luv Wine Bar y QUEso, and taquerias on what seemed like every corner. Jim's Burgers and other landmarks, street names, and familiar smells made me feel a sense of home. I drove by the meeting site at 6:45 p.m. and noticed that

no one was inside. Not wanting to be the first person to arrive, I stopped for a tea latte at Primera Taza Coffee Shop. I fixed my drink, got in my car and parked in front of Corazón del Pueblo. I entered the building and was struck by the beautiful art exhibit that featured creative interpretations of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Three paintings captured my attention: the Virgin with a *luchador* mask, the Virgin as Coatlicue and finally as a chola or homegirl. I sat down on a chair facing the center of the room and began to take notes about my observations, smiling and saying hello to women as they began to arrive one by one. Most of them smiled back, some were shy and remained quiet as we waited for the meeting to start, others conversed with one another. I found out later that seven out of the ten women also attended the meeting for the first time, which is probably why most of us waited for a more formal cue to interact. Felicia arrived just past 7:00 p.m., greeted everyone individually, and asked us to take a seat in the circle of chairs. She sat down, lit some sage and placed it in a seashell, introduced herself and said a prayer: "I thank the Creator for Mujeres de Maiz, for the ancestors, for all our relations, and for another day of life." Felicia then passed the sage to the woman on her left and asked that we each introduce ourselves and share anything we would like.

Before the meeting, Felicia talked to the core MdM members about my project and they agreed that I could participate. When it was my turn to speak I introduced myself, gave thanks for being a part of the circle, and announced that I was a graduate student in Chicana and Chicano studies writing my dissertation about Mujeres de Maiz. With everyone's permission, I continued, I would like to take notes and pictures during the meetings. I looked around the circle for approval, and was happy to see the women shaking their heads in agreement. A woman named Lorena was sitting on my left. She

whispered to me that she graduated from UCSB and said "I think your project is great." As the words and energy began to fill the circle, I felt a sense of relief because many of the other women shared that it was their first time organizing with MdM and also because the space felt culturally and spiritually familiar. I was raised Catholic and later with pan-Indigenous religious traditions. My mother came into her Native identity and spirituality in her 30s when I was a pre-teen in the early 1990s and we shared that experience together. My own beliefs and practices were present at the meeting in the form of what has recently been identified as "spiritual mestizaje," "Indianizing Catholicism" and "nepantla spirituality" (Anzaldúa 2009; Broyles-González 2002; Delgadillo 2011; Facio and Lara 2014; Medina 2008; Moraga 2011). The meeting ended around 10:00 p.m. As I was packing up my things Felicia told me that the core members were very excited that I was going to document their group's history and experiences, which reaffirmed I was welcome in the space. I was glad to know this because the other core members were not present at the organizing meetings. They were busy with full time jobs and many are artists, caretakers and graduate students who work on MdM projects behind the scenes. So I had not had the opportunity to meet them yet. The organizers of the annual events varied from year to year. Some returned from organizing in previous years. New organizers were invited by returning organizers or by core MdM members. On the drive back to Santa Barbara, I had a renewed sense of excitement about my project, about being a graduate student, and about the forthcoming year.

As the weeks passed I got to know the MdM organizers. I learned that I shared a number of social identities with them—I identify ethnically, politically and spiritually as an Indigenous mestiza and my parents were born and raised in East Los Angeles. My

maternal and paternal grandparents migrated from New Mexico to Boyle Heights and El Sereno respectively in the 1930s and 1940s; my parents are blue-collar working class monolingual English speakers; and I am a first generation college student who was transformed by ethnic studies and U.S. third world feminisms. The women's ages ranged from 25 to 35, they lived or were raised in the greater Los Angeles area, many were first generation college graduates, and a few were working on Masters degrees. Many of the organizers inquired about my project and verbally expressed their support. I began to feel more comfortable participating and taking an active role volunteering for various tasks and in offering my opinion in discussions. Many of the organizers attended the weekly meetings sporadically because they had to attend to their other obligations. I had the privilege of having funding to travel back and forth to Los Angeles and an open schedule that comes with being an advanced graduate student. I was able to attend nearly every meeting and consequently I connected with many of the women. I also felt that I should take on a highly participatory role to prove that I was fully committed to the collective and not just some dubious researcher who would leave after I got what I needed.

It was not that anyone made me believe that this level of involvement was required, but because I have worked with and am a member of different Indigenous and women of color groups, I was familiar with the protocol of earning one's place in the community through active involvement—what we call "putting in work." There were usually anywhere between five to ten women at the meetings, and those who were new, like me, seemed to grow more comfortable over time. The meetings themselves were healing and sometimes functioned as group therapy. We always gave thanks or said a prayer, shared stories and advice, encouraged one another, and we all seemed to care

deeply about our city, our culture, and future generations. After a few gatherings I began using "we" and "our" when talking about MdM in the meetings. I would phrase comments and questions similar to, "How many flyers do *we* need to print?" Although I was growing comfortable at the organizing meetings, I faced an internal struggle with my identity as a participant-observer. This struggle surfaced in my feminist methods course, which I consider below.

**Intimacy, Affective Ties, and Relationships Defined Through Power**

While on campus my use of "we" and "our" became "them" and "their." I struggled to articulate my identity and my role as an MdM organizer. I felt as though I had to be detached and use academic language, despite the limitations I felt about the terminology—research, fieldwork, ethnography, informant, human subjects protocol, and the list goes on. I felt that those words could not capture the spirit of my experiences. Talking about my personal and communal intellectual–spiritual–emotional journey as "research" illustrated by technical academic jargon made me feel as though I was participating in some exploitative hegemonic project. These feelings became especially salient for me after reading Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2009). I turned to this text, and others like it[13] hoping to learn how other Indigenous scholars grappled with concerns similar to my own. These texts provided me with critical insight in negotiating my identity and articulating my story as an Indigenous feminist researcher, but not before I faced an existential crisis. In what follows, I consider issues I encountered related to intimacy, affective ties, and relationships defined through power.

[13] Other texts that shaped my understanding of research methods are: Blea 1995; Brown and Strega 2005; Fong 2008; Kovach 2009; Menzies 2001; Nájera-Ramírez 1999; Smith 1999; Zavella 2006; Zinn 1979.

In *Research is Ceremony* Shawn Wilson argues, "The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allow us a raised level of consciousness and insights into our world" (2009, 11). I thought, *At last! I have a way to explain what I, or rather, what we (MdM) are doing in terms that I can understand!* I planned to write about the work of MdM as "spiritual activism," as creative and political. With Wilson's perspective I realized the work that I do as a researcher is also ceremony. In Wilson's view, methodology within an Indigenous research paradigm is essentially the building of more relationships. Participant-observation is all about relationship building. However, Wilson questions his ability to illustrate "research as ceremony" in his writing and in situations with non-Native audiences who unlike Indigenous peoples, value individualism and typically view time as linear, history as fact, and ceremony as metaphor. At the MdM meetings I was able to slowly make connections and build relationships with the women, but similar to Wilson, there was a disconnect for me in the classroom and in my writing.

***Free Write January 5, 2011***

Feminist Methods Course Week #1 In-Class Writing Prompt: "What question concerning the social world you would like to investigate if you were guaranteed not to fail?" This is an extremely hard question for me to address. This is an existential question that I'm not sure I know how to approach. What do I care most about in the world? I interpret "what question" as "what social-political issue" or "problem" would I most like to solve? At the very least I think I understand the question as: "If answered, what question would most benefit my community or communities that I care about?" And what

does it mean to fail at answering a question about the social world? I find myself trying to pick apart the prompt in my mind rather than actually attempting to answer it directly. I keep rereading what I wrote hoping it will give me clues as to how I want to respond; maybe it will come to me if I just keep writing. But nothing yet. Maybe it's because this question is depressing. It makes me think about all of the unanswered questions I have about my research. Or maybe it's because I feel the impossibility of any real concrete solutions to social problems. There are only partial answers, minor shifts and disruptions. How does this prompt make me think about my own research? Can I fail?

*Post-Free Write Thoughts January 5, 2011*

What is "activist scholarship?" Is it only defined as working in/with/for grassroots social justice movements? Is activist scholarship limited to research or can it include teaching? Is teaching students in radical ways considered activism? (shifting consciousness, mentorship) Can I just be involved in social justice work that is not about/for my research? What about short-term involvement with organizations? What is the difference between volunteering and activism? Is volunteering less important? How is activism defined and evaluated in academia? It's always been a form of survival for me before I got to graduate school—it's just what I did… what I do.

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The journal entry above is the first documented critical reflection that marks the beginning of my internal struggle brought on by a writing prompt that would be compounded by future writing exercises, readings and discussions. In the moment I did not understand why I was having such a difficult time. Hindsight and self-exploration would provide me with some clarity. First, I felt constrained because I believed I needed

to perform my intelligence, which meant I needed to appear rigorous, detached and well spoken. I felt compelled to use academic jargon in my writing and in the classroom in order to be viewed as a legitimate scholar. I had so many negative experiences that drove my impulse to perform my intelligence. On multiple occasions in my graduate career my ideas, my values and my character were criticized and my intelligence was questioned, sometimes blatantly and maliciously. I did not know how to defend my position or articulate my ideas in languages that made sense to me so I often remained silent. I later realized that academia had disciplined my behavior and injured my psyche and my spirit.

I struggled with the concept of ethnography, participant-observation specifically, because it stems from cultural anthropology and has been, and to some degree still is, used by scholars to conduct unethical research on marginalized communities of color. (Blea 1995; Brown and Strega 2005; Kovach 2009; Smith 1999). I was aware that scholars of critical, ethnic, and feminist studies have decolonized and reconfigured a number of qualitative methods, participant-observation included (Blea 1995; Brown and Strega 2005; Denzin, Lincoln and Smith 2008; Kovach 2009; Smith 1999; Stacey 1999; Wilson 2009), but the words—research, fieldwork, ethnography, informant, human subjects protocol—still left a bad taste in my mouth. I also felt resentful because "immersion" in a situation and "observation" of a situation are part of intuitive processes for me because my family raised me with these approaches to gaining knowledge. Nonetheless, I still needed to learn the vocabulary and techniques required of me by my academic area of interest. I believe I also had trouble expressing myself because I had not yet clearly defined my audience or the structures of knowledge that informed my work. I was writing and speaking in terms that were either too general or too specific. I struggled

to effectively produce work for both a rigorous academic audience, defined broadly, and cultural activists, specifically the Mujeres de Maiz.

Second, I felt conflicted because I did not feel comfortable discussing my emotional investment and affective ties to MdM with my colleagues in class, despite the fact that we read and discussed articles on the topic of intimacy in research (Irwin 2006; Oakley 1981; Steedman 2008). For example, we read "Into the Dark Heart of Ethnography: The Lived Ethics and Inequality of Intimate Field Relationships" by sociologist Katherine Irwin. In her introspective article, she subjectively examines her personal experiences of "marginality, conflicting loyalty pulls, professional and personal angst, moments of intense pleasure and joy as well as devastating bouts of self-doubt and failure" (2006, 160). I did not want to appear vulnerable with those whom I considered to be cultural outsiders by admitting that I too had feelings articulated by Irwin. I had difficulty negotiating my perceived divisions between and within the MdM community and my academic community (the feminist methods seminar). On numerous occasions my discomfort resulted with me censoring myself, often shutting down completely, assuming that if I discussed the intimate ties that I felt, I would be labeled by my colleagues as uncritical, not rigorous, inadequate or overly emotional. In *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (2009) First Nations education scholar Margaret Kovach notes how Indigenous scholars often feel apprehensive in bringing cultural knowledges into Western research spaces that have only recently begun to accept "other" or "diverse" epistemologies and approaches to research.

I developed friendships and connections with many of the MdM organizers on different levels. I attended traditional Native ceremonies with some and shared meals in their homes. I have presented with some at conferences, invited them to perform and give guest lectures in my classes, exchanged advice about graduate school, family, health, spirituality, and food ways, and have had many informal conversations that took place "off the record." Feminist sociologist Ann Oakley, who is well known for her article "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," critiques classical sociological interview methods and argues that meaningful feminist research depends on empathy and reciprocity. She claims that research rarely comments on the social or personal characteristics of the interviewer, the affective rapport between the researcher and the interviewees, and how interactions can develop into "more broadly-based social relationships" (1981, 31). Oakley reflects on her relationships with the women she interviewed claiming, "the attitude I conveyed could have had influence in encouraging the women to regard me as a friend rather then purely as data-gatherer" (47). Like Oakley, I interact with many of the women beyond the "data-gathering" period and I view objectivity in research as impossible (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1991; Haraway 1988; Kovach 2009; Levins Morales 1988). I developed friendships with MdM members and I am invested in telling their stories.

My positions as insider and outsider converged, or more accurately, they crashed. In "Field Research in Minority Communities" sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn (1979) and in the article "Feminist Insider Dilemmas" anthropologist Patricia Zavella (2006) consider the advantages and challenges of being a Chicana "insider-outsider" researcher. The authors argue the insider-outsider position can facilitate access to conduct research in

a Chican@ community; it can lead to understanding subtleties in language and actions; it leads to insights through critical self-reflection; and a higher level of sensitivity and mutual trust and respect exist. Zinn and Zavella suggest that the insider-outsider status can also create ethical dilemmas for the Chicana researcher because she often feels a high level of accountability and responsibility in conducting fieldwork and in analyzing the data. For me, the difficulty did not result from my affective ties, but because I felt overwhelmed by a high level of accountability and responsibility in representing MdM and my experiences in an academic setting. I was grappling with the unfamiliar power that comes with telling someone else's story.

**Participant Observation Ethnography and the Path of Conocimiento**

My identities as MdM organizer and researcher constantly shifted depending on the context. I struggled to maintain my confidence as I negotiated between what I perceived to be the incongruous values and practices of my respective roles. As a graduate student in Chicana and Chicano studies and feminist studies, one of my primary research areas is Chicana feminisms with an emphasis in Anzaldúan theory and philosophy. It is ironic that my struggles were a part of my own "path of conocimiento," a process that Anzaldúa describes in her article "now let us shift ... the path of conocimiento ... inner work, public acts" (2002a). I was unable to recognize my experiences as such until after the process transformed me.

Using a multitude of concepts and metaphors, Anzaldúa illustrates the new mestiza's process of coming into consciousness (2002a; 2007). She states that during this process "la mestiza" is in a constant state of "mental nepantilism," which is a Nahuatl term that means "torn between ways." La mestiza struggles with choices, is in a state

"perpetual transition," she "is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another," and is in a state of liminality (2007, 100). Anzaldúa asserts Chicanas receive diverse and sometimes conflicting socialization from their Chican@ culture and from dominant white American culture, at times leaving her shocked, confused, and stunned. Although these effects may be interpreted as negative, Anzaldúa argues there are productive ways for la mestiza to come to terms with her multiple and sometimes contradictory identities, responses to life, her social location, and her beliefs, but not before hard emotional labor is undertaken on the path of conocimiento.

Anzaldúa explains that there are seven stages on the journey she calls the path of conocimiento. The stages do not happen in any particular order or for a specified period of time. Below I provide a brief summary of the seven stages.

1. "el arrebato... rupture, fragmentation... an ending, a beginning" In this stage, la mestiza is faced with "opposing accounts, perspectives, or belief systems" (2002a, 546-47). In her attempts to recover from the rupture, she is propelled from the so-called safe place she once called home into nepantla.
2. "nepantla... torn between ways." Nepantla occurs most often. It is a transitional space of critical reflection and transformation that emerges between each of the other stages.
3. "the Coatlicue state... desconocimiento and the cost of knowing." I spent a great deal of time in the Coatlicue state so I will explain this stage in detail. The Coatlicue state is where la mestiza confronts feelings of confusion, anger, guilt and despair that result from historical traumas and resistance to self-knowledge. Coatlicue is a period of incubation. La mestiza vacillates between "desconocimientos," ignorance or denial of

knowledge, and the urge to examine herself. She teeters on the edge of awareness. Anzaldúa argues this inner confrontation occurs often and that "every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing" (2007, 70). Every crossing is part of a larger creative process that can result on a large scale as well, in cultural shifts. Anzaldúa describes the Coatlicue state as necessary to sort through pain and confusion in order to make the soul, develop the psyche, expand consciousness, and come into being. In a 1994 interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego, Anzaldúa illustrates the link between the Coatlicue state and nepantla by explaining:

> When you come out of the Coatlicue state you come out of nepantla, this birthing stage where you feel like you're reconfiguring your identity and you don't know where you are. You used to be this person but now maybe you're different in some way. You're changing worlds and cultures and maybe classes, sexual preferences. So you go through this birthing of nepantla. When you're in the midst of the Coatlicue state—the cave, the dark—you're hibernating or hiding, you're gestating and giving birth to yourself. You're in a womb state. When you come out of the womb state you pass through the birth canal, the passageway I call nepantla. (2000, 225-26)

In "now let us shift," Anzaldúa describes nepantla as "the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems" (2002a, 541) and in "(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe Spaces" she associates nepantla with "states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another" (2002b, 1). According to Anzaldúa, la mestiza has agency to examine and revise the meanings, values, and practices that she has inherited from both dominant Western Euro-U.S. culture and from Chican@ culture by tapping into a heightened awareness that she describes in *Borderlands La Frontera* as "la facultad," or what Patricia Hill Collins (1991) calls the skills of "the outsider within," which also come

from living on the margins.

4. "the call... el compromiso... the crossing and conversion." In this stage Anzaldúa says la mestiza is called to transform her condition. In an attempt to change her situation and in reaching for the future, la mestiza moves beyond her bodily limits (which she calls "yoga of the body"). She crosses the threshold of awareness and surrenders aspects of her old self.
5. "putting Coyolxauhqui together... new personal and collective 'stories.'" Anzaldúa uses the mytho-historical figure Coyolxauhqui because she exemplifies "the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives" (2002a, 558-63). La mestiza rewrites her autohistoria in this stage.
6. "the blow-up... a clash of realities." La mestiza struggles to enact her new vision in the world and clashes with those who hold onto their desconocimientos.
7. "shifting realities... acting out the vision or spiritual activism." La mestiza becomes a *nepantlera*—a negotiator, bridge-builder, mediator, truth seeker and truth speaker—who facilitates connections and alliances.

Anzaldúa claims, "Together the seven stages open the senses, increasing the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes. All seven are present within each stage, and they occur concurrently, chronologically or not" (2002a, 545). Reconstruction takes place in all stages and no change is permanent on the path of conocimiento.

I incubated in the Coatlicue state as I painfully constructed a new identity as

activist-scholar community organizer. As I planned how I would participate at the Live Art Show, I decided to enjoy the show as an audience member and I would also work as an organizer and observe as a "real researcher." I encountered difficulties executing my plan. I fought against being involved as an audience member and organizer because I could not fuse these roles with what I thought I should be doing as a researcher. Below I reflect on my original plans to participate in the 2011 Live Art Show, "Soldadera de Amor," or "Soldier of Love," followed by an account of what actually took place and my emergence from the Coatlicue state.

***"Soldadera de Amor": Reflections on Participant Observation at the Live Art Show***

In order to respectfully take part in the MdM Live Art Show, I carefully considered various aspects and specific tasks in my role as a participant-observer. I considered the following logistical questions in anticipation of the show: What is my role as a participant observer? What are my guiding questions going into the space? What aspects of the show will I document—my own experiences and interactions, interactions between audience members, MdM organizers, performances? What technologies will I rely on to document the show and what are the pros and cons of using each technology? What are the pros and cons of bringing undergraduate student volunteers and how can I ensure they are prepared and understand their roles and responsibilities to me and to MdM?

In past years I have been a graduate mentor with Mujeres Unidas por Justicia, Educación y Revolución (MUJER), an undergraduate Raza women's social justice organization at UCSB since 2009. I worked closely with two members of the group during the 2010-2011 academic year. These two members accompanied me to an MdM

planning meeting where we discussed the need for volunteers on the day of the Live Art Show. The following week, I asked one of my mentees to recruit additional MUJER members—so there was a need for me to determine their roles and responsibilities. I led a mandatory volunteer meeting a few days before the show in order to ensure they were prepared. I created an agenda that included a schedule for the day of the event, volunteer stations with a description of duties and expectations, and a list of what to bring, including comfortable shoes and spending money. After reviewing each agenda item in detail, we collectively decided to arrive in L.A. a few hours before the show to eat breakfast (which I provided in appreciation for their work), to meet the MdM organizers, assist with set up, and familiarize ourselves with the venue (see fig. 6).

I seriously evaluated the tasks for which the student volunteers and I would be responsible. I considered taking pictures with a digital camera, recording with a video camera, writing notes in a journal, dictating my observations into a digital voice recorder, or doing it all in some combination, or none of the above. I reflected on the ways that I best learn and make observations. I decided to take pictures with my personal digital camera, shop in the marketplace, eat food, talk with friends, roam around on my own, and enjoy the show as I had in the past. I also planned to use a digital voice recorder to dictate things that I wanted to make sure I remembered, which seemed less distracting and less time consuming than journaling. Writing notes in a journal was also impractical for me because it would detract my attention from being present in the moment to participate as an audience member. I decided to create a digital audio entry before and after the show, (and throughout when I felt compelled), stepping outside or into the green room when the noise levels were too loud.


Figure 5. Mujeres de Maiz. *14th Anniversary Live Art Show: Soldadera de Amor flyer*, 2011.


Figure 6. Student volunteers in front of the Live Art Show venue Casa Grande. From left to right: Jocelyn Gutierrez, Cristina Cruz Navarro, Virginia Ramirez, Nicole Perez, Janet Muniz, Annay Gonzalez, Danny Millian and Ariana Andrade. Boyle Heights, March 6, 2011.

I also planned to document the Live Art Show with a digital video camera. Linguist Mary Bucholtz argues using video recording as a part of ethnography "allows for a richer, more embodied study of social life (like audio, video is still limited in a complex world but gets us a litter closer to a fuller view of social interactions)" (2011, n.p.). To document these social interactions, I decided to set up one stationary camera to record the performances on stage. I also wanted to have a secondary mobile camera to record interviews with vendors and participants on the first floor, performers in the greenroom, and MdM members wherever they happened to be. In order to focus on my roles as audience member and organizer, I planned to have two student volunteers run the video cameras. I would provide them with basic training and make sure the one with the most experience was in charge of the mobile camera. She would receive a list of basic questions to ask participants in addition to receiving human subjects training at the volunteer meeting.

There were many decisions I made regarding my role as participant-observer at "Soldadera de Amor," and my responsibilities as a researcher working with eight student volunteers. I felt a great deal of stress because the Live Art Show happens once a year and I believed the show was my only source of data. Days prior to the show I had a major realization that came to me in a flash during a moment of panic. I recognized that my experiences also matter, that I am a member of the community within which I am conducting research, and that my own participation as both an audience member and organizer is meaningful. Sociologist Christine Williams argues that participant-observation, "generates an appreciation for the embodied dimension of social life" generated by the physical and emotional intensity that comes with being immersed in a

community (2011, 211). I also reminded myself that I chose participant-observation as my method because it closely resembles the "learn by doing" approach with which I was raised. My family taught me to be a "participant-observer," to "follow my intuition," and to "be respectful" and "build relationships" my entire life. Despite my preparation, the moment I arrived at the venue I felt angst from attempts to integrate my identities as participant-observer/researcher, MdM organizer, and audience member.

My detailed plan fell apart with my compulsion to take a hands-on role and participate as an organizer. Anxiety came from thinking I would miss out on some piece of critical data if I did not observe diligently. In their book *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes* Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) note that ethnographers cannot observe every detail. Rather, they can develop certain perspectives revealing multiple truths in others' lives. Quoting Elliot G. Mishler (1979) the authors argue, "the task is not to exhaust the singular meaning of an event but to reveal the multiplicity of meanings, and… it is through the observer's encounter with the event that these meanings emerge" (218). In "Of Fieldwork, Folklore, and Festival: Performance Encounters," Chicana anthropologist Olga Nájera-Ramírez notes similar apprehensions in documenting a festival in Jalisco, Mexico. She writes that it is "impossible to report all points of views discovered in the field. This problem becomes further complicated when dealing with festival because of its multidimensional/multivocal aspect" (1999, 186). No amount of literature review could have prepared me for the feelings of anxiety I had, nor could it have guided me on how to be a "participant observer." As the morning went on, I relaxed a bit and tried to stop overthinking what I should do next. The doors were not yet open to the public so I began to participate mainly as an organizer. I realized that I could in fact bridge my roles

as participant and observer. I was moving through the Coatlicue state and into nepantla. I began to trust that the student volunteers could handle the tasks I had assigned to them. This included setting up chairs in the main stage area and placing a paper questionnaire underneath the chairs for approximately 400 festival attendees to complete; using a tally counter at the entrance to track the number of audience members; assisting the vendors to set up their tables; ensuring the audience turn in a completed questionnaire as they exited; and other miscellaneous tasks such as restocking the bathroom and helping to direct the audience and performers to the appropriate areas in the building.

I browsed the vendor area (see fig. 7), took pictures, purchased jewelry and food, caught up with old friends that I ran into, and floated in and out of the performance area. I decided to take charge of the cameras rather than have the students be responsible for this important component of my research. I set up the stationary camera to record the performers on the stage upstairs and asked that one volunteer change the tapes as needed during the times I was not there to do so myself. I ran the mobile camera and interviewed performers in the green room and vendors in the marketplace. A few of the MdM organizers, myself included, stayed at the venue until 11:00 p.m. to clean and make sure all loose ends were tied up. By the end of the night I felt compelled to "put Coyolxauhqui together" and write about my experiences as a community organizer, as an audience member, and as an activist researcher. The following week I began to piece this story and myself together. I conclude with my characterization of engaged community work and activist-scholarship as an offering to Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui and to activist scholars seeking autohistoria-teorías that might help them think through their own work.

Figure 7. Vendor table at the Live Art Show *Mujer Mercado*. March 6, 2011.

**A Blueprint For Activist Scholarship and Community Organizing**

Anzaldúa argues, "Conocimiento comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms" (2002a, 542). This written product would not have been possible unless I opened my senses and examined my "mind-body-emotion matrix."[14] I did this internal work by engaging in multiple creative and spiritual practices. I took dance and yoga classes. I worked with an O.M.D., Lac. (doctor of oriental medicine, licensed acupuncturist), nutritionist and spiritual healers. I changed my eating habits, I spent time at the beach and I went on hikes. I studied Theater of the Oppressed and Spoken Wor(l)d Art Performance as Activism (SWAPA) with

[14] I learned about the mind-body-emotion matrix from working with liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval in her course at UC Santa Barbara "The Shaman-Nahual/Active-Witness Ceremony Through Story-Wor(l)d-Art Performance As Activism."

Chela Sandoval. These creative and spiritual practices also helped me develop a heightened sense of awareness, my "facultad," to understand that I was on the path of conocimiento. Nearly four years have passed since I first entered the MdM community as an organizer and participant-observer ethnographer. I now understand my own Indigenous mestiz@ research agenda as a localized part of a global Indigenous project of validation, survival, social justice, self-determination and decolonization by Indigenous researchers working in and for their own communities. Below is an outline of my research agenda that I crafted in the hopes of providing guidance for others interested in engaged community work and activist scholarship methods:

1. Reflexivity: Examine my social location and how that shapes the research. Consider issues of power, intimacy and my emotional investment in the project;
2. Define research goals and intentions with the research community;
3. Transparency: document goals and intentions, outcomes, challenges and opportunities. Represent these clearly and candidly in the writing;
4. Accessibility: Decide how to communicate findings to both an academic and a non-academic audience through storytelling techniques in writing and mixed approaches in presentations in academic and community venues;
5. Build relationships: that are respectful, caring and aimed at equalizing power with communities: with student volunteers, with academic colleagues and with myself. Also build my relationship to knowledge and with my writing processes;
6. Accountability: to the research community: check in, show up, put in work and be honest. Accountability to my self: check in with myself, take care of myself physically, mentally and emotionally, set realistic goals, be flexible, be honest, listen

to my intuition, do not be afraid to take risks or ask for help, remember that there is no failure only opportunities to learn;

7. Recall this quote by Gloria Anzaldúa as needed: “By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered” (2002a, 540).

## CHAPTER II

### Where is Indigeneity in Chican@ Studies?

Mujeres de Maiz (MdM) is a cornerstone of the artivist movement in Los Angeles. The collective creates spiritually and politically charged cultural production 1) to construct and assert an urban Indigenous mestiz@ identity and consciousness grounded in transnational feminist of color histories, politics and aesthetics; 2) to open up meanings in such a way that any audience member can subscribe to their form of liberatory consciousness and being; and 3) to create reparative narratives that challenge dominant cultural representations and that critique social injustices. In order to understand the form of identity and consciousness expressed by MdM, here I turn to contextualize their work within an evolving body of scholarship that considers Chican@ historical and theoretical constructions of indigeneity and mestizaje expressed in cultural production.

Indigenous mestiz@ feminist writers, artists and performers, from the late 1960s to the present, have utilized diverse representational strategies to engage simultaneously in social critique and to make sense of their various heritages.[15] In this chapter I show these heritages are Indigenous-Mexican, U.S. Native American, Spanish, Basque, African, Filipin@ and mestiz@. For them, cultural production is used as a vehicle to construct and articulate their cultural and spiritual roots, personal and communal

[15] It is important to note that since the late 1960s, Chicana feminists have constructed their multiple subjectivities not only in resistance to Chicano nationalism (and U.S. hegemonic feminism), but also in solidarity with an emerging U.S. third world feminist consciousness informed by decolonial and anticolonial movements worldwide. As they critiqued sexism, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism, feminists of color in the U.S. created a new cross-racial political subjectivity that linked various struggles for social justice. Much of this occurred through spiritualized practice. This political solidarity is evidenced in the cultural production of many feminists of color. Specific examples are discussed in subsequent chapters.

histories, and collective memories, and to radically restructure their lives. Through creative practices and cultural texts, Indigenous mestiz@s present alternatives to dominant media images and popular cultural renderings of women of color. In other words, Indigenous mestiz@ cultural productions express images of everyday life, call attention to social and political concerns, and engage in processes of healing and transformation.

This chapter traces how Indigenous mestiz@s imagine and represent themselves in cultural production. Specifically I examine how cultural critics and feminist theorists have conceptualized Aztlán, indigeneity, and mestizaje in three phases: 1) Chicano Movement, 2) Chicana feminist, and 3) "radical indigenous mestizaje." I begin by considering how Aztlán (the Chicano geographic and spiritual homeland) and indigeneity were understood, represented and imaged during the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. My use of Chicano (with an "o") is both a temporal and ideological referent. The dominant ideologies of the early Chicano Movement (1965-1975) were often masculinist and heteropatriarchal. These ideologies manifested as practices that prioritized issues of racial and socioeconomic justice, cultural pride and unity, *carnalismo* (brotherhood), and maintaining the nuclear familia—over and above women's concerns. When I use "Chicano" I am either referring to this time period or to individuals (past and present) who subscribe to these ideologies. I map out the transitions through which Indigenous mestiz@ feminists have modified Chicano conceptualizations of Aztlán and indigeneity, particularly through creative media. I then sketch a trajectory for "radical indigenous mestizaje" in response to a desire to expand Chican@ identity and as a framework to examine the work of MdM. I do not intend to imply that one conceptual paradigm is

replaced by successive interventions. Instead, I posit that these intellectual histories should be understood as crisscrossing strands of political thought that exist in the contemporary moment.[16]

**Chicano Indigeneity**

What are the key historical and theoretical discourses around Chicano indigeneity, that is, a masculinist indigeneity, that emerged within early Chicano Movement cultural politics (1965-1975)? First, there was an intense recovery and reclamation project of Indigenous heritage and identity during El Movimiento that is evident in the political activity and artistic and literary expression of the time. Cultural practitioners deployed Mesoamerican symbols, myths, and artistic forms as part of their effort to construct a Chicano cultural identity that was decidedly anti-imperialist and anti-racist. The 1969 Chicano Manifesto "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" marked an entry of pre-conquest imaginaries into the present-day Chicano imaginary. However masculinist the Chicano Movement became, even the early leaders attempted in El Plan to recognize various peoples who were involved in building the Chicano Movement. The use of "mestizo" was a way to recognize movement activists who were Filipino, Afro-Mexicano, Indigenous Mexicans (who were often not recognized as Indigenous), U.S. Native Americans, and multi-ethnic peoples. Fashioned at the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, El Plan proclaimed

> We declare the Independence of our Mestizo nation. We are a Bronze People with a Bronze Culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the Bronze Continent, We are a Nation, We are a Union of free pueblos, We are Aztlán.

[16] Present-day Chicano cultural expressions, for example, often utilize masculinist Mexica/Aztec imagery and ideologies that emerged during El Movimiento. See McFarland 2012.

Cultural activists Alberto Urista, who writes under the pen name Alurista, and Rodolfo "Corky" González penned popular Chicano poetry that asserted "the Aztec heritage" of all mestizo people who were often generalized as colonized "Mexican Americans." El Plan and the poetry of Alurista and González marked a turn toward Aztec symbology, including the concept of Aztlán. Indeed, Aztlán is linked to the Aztec homeland and was thus designated as the lost homeland of Chicanos. In other words, as Chicano historian Michael Pina writes in 1989, during the 1970s "Chicanos turned to pre-Hispanic myths and symbols as a source of spiritual inspiration in their struggle for national self-determination" (40).

Playwright and poet Luis Valdez called for a different cosmology. His 1971 poem "Pensamiento Serpentino" asked Chicanos to view themselves not as descendants of Aztecs, but as "Neo-Mayas" (1990, 173). Valdez turned to the Mayan living philosophy of *In Lak'Ech*, which translates in Spanish to *eres mi otro yo* or in English to you are my other self. Valdez's point was to delineate a Chicano identity beyond ethnic and racial heritage. He called for anchoring Chicano identity politics in a metaphysics of interconnectedness. Aside from the work of Valdez, many Chican@ activists during the period of 1965-1975 deployed Mesoamerican symbology that emphasized Aztec heritage in artistic mediums that included public murals, posters, teatro, and literature (Alurista 1972, 1976; Anaya 1972, 1976; Gaspar de Alba 1998; González 1972; Jackson 2009; Latorre 2008; Méndez 1974; Ochoa 2003). For example, literary events were held across the Southwest from 1973 to 1978 called The *Festivales de Flor y Canto*, named for the Aztec vision of poetry as flower and song. These festivals featured Chicano Movement poets, playwrights, performance artists, visual artists, and musicians (Alurista 1976).

The use of Mesoamerican symbology early in the Chicano Movement was an anti-colonial move for challenging the notion that Chicanos were a foreign culture to the United States. The concept of Aztlán worked to establish the sustained presence of Chicanos in what has been known as the Southwestern United States since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Author and educator Rudolfo Anaya argues that prior to El Movimiento, Mexican Americans relied on a Spanish fantasy heritage in the construction of their ethnic identities, which "left out the reality of our mestizo heritage. Part of the Movement's work was to revive our connection with our Indian past, and to seek a truer definition of that past" (Anaya and Lomelí 1989, 234). Thus, the construction of indigeneity during El Movimiento permitted Chicanos to celebrate a previously denigrated and denied aspect of their identity.

Some Indigenous mestiz@ feminists and cultural critics have criticized Chicano conceptualizations of Aztlán and indigeneity for essentializing a distant and romantic "Indian" past, for lacking real political efficacy, and for its heteropatriarchal ideologies (Aldama 2001; Anzaldúa 2007; Chabram-Dernersesian 2006; Contreras 2008; Rueda Esquibel 2003). However, decolonial theorist Roberto Hernández re-evaluates Chicano Movement history arguing that there existed different constituencies of "Indigenous Xicanos"—the "cultural nationalists" and the "*indigenistas*," who were diverse in and of themselves as well. These groups had different political agendas, spiritual commitments, and cultural expressions in relationship to indigeneity that persist today. Hernández argues that unlike the cultural nationalists "who simply invoke pre-Colombian imagery and symbols for political purposes, yet may discount indigenous perspectives, lived experiences, struggles and living people themselves," *indigenistas* "actively engage and

maintain spiritual and political commitments… with the respective teachings of (their) traditional communities in a conscionable and respectful way" (2005, 128-29). He continues, *indigenistas* tend "to be more historically attuned and acknowledging of how different colonial histories and racialization processes have constructed present-day relations with other native peoples and one another in given spaces as negotiated by geopolitical borders" (2005, 129). According to Hernández, *indigenistas* practice a transnational or hemispheric mode of Indigenous political solidarity.[17] In my view, "Indigenous mestiz@" identity is an extension of *indigenista* consciousness and politics.

Following a similar to approach to Chicano Movement history, postcolonial scholar and literary critic Rafael Pérez-Torres cautions against over simplified critiques of Chicano conceptualizations of Aztlán. In his insightful essay "Refiguring Aztlán," Pérez-Torres lays out the multiple articulations, positions, and significances of Aztlán, noting that they are often limited in scope. He argues, "Too often, the name of this mythic homeland is either dismissed as part of an exclusionary nationalist agenda or uncritically affirmed as an element essential to *chicanismo*" (1997, 213). He makes two points: Chicano Movement discourse undoubtedly relied on post-revolutionary Mexican nationalism in its construction of indigeneity. Yet, Chicano identity politics were distinctly anti-racist and served as a means of cultural empowerment through the reclamation of Indigenous identity. This reclamation of Indigenous heritage is particularly significant for Chican@s given that "…[I]n the United States—'Mexican Americans' are expected to accept anti-indigenous discourses as their own. In this

[17] Hernández elaborates on the ways in which a critical Indigenous Xican@ subjectivity, or those with an "*indigenista* perspective," has led to strategic coalitions with Native American activists since (and prior to) the 1960s. Raul Salinas and Carlos Cortéz Koyokuikatl are prime examples of Chicano Movement activists with an "indigenista" consciousness. See Salinas' *Indio Trails: A Xicano Odyssey Through Indian Country* (2006) and Miner's "Aztlán, Anishinaabewaki, Ixachilan" (2012). See also Aldama (2001).

respect," Pérez-Torres argues the notion of "Aztlán has allowed for a subjectivity that reclaims the connection to indigenous peoples and cultures" (228). He argues that the image of Aztlán is not without complications, including an unclear political efficacy and a fetishized construction of a pure Indigenous Aztec past. Nevertheless, Pérez-Torres points to the ways in which scholars have redeployed Aztlán. He argues that "Aztlán as a cultural/national symbol represents a paradox: it seeks to stand as a common denominator among Chicano populations, yet it divides rather than unifies; it maintains cultural traditions while promoting assimilation into Anglo-American culture; it affirms indigenous ancestry while simultaneously erasing the very historical, cultural, and geographic specificity of that ancestry" (228-29). Pérez-Torres asserts that conceptualizations of Aztlán have been expanded and should be understood as a borderland of "profound discontinuity between regions delimiting racial, sexual, gender, and economic identities" (229). He points to the potentiality of Aztlán, arguing that it names the "space of liberation so fondly yearned for" (235). This potentiality can be read in Chicana feminist resignifications of Aztlán.

**Aztlán Resignified: The Chicana Body as Homeland**

Literary critic Sheila Contreras provides a new perspective on Chican@ indigeneity in *Blood Lines: Myth, Indigenism, and Chicana/o Literature* (2008). Contreras defines three categories of Chican@ "literary indigenism" arguing early constructions of "indigenist nationalism" were constructed through Mexican state discourses and European modernist primitivism. Chicana feminists diverged from "indigenist nationalism" in multiple ways. Contreras argues Chicanas "assumed control of the discourse of indigenism, redeploying philosophical precepts and conceptual

iconographies to narrate a new mytho-history made to oppose the male-centered imperatives of masculinist nationalism" (2008, 103). Chicana feminists redefined androcentric, or male defined conceptions of Chicano indigeneity by unsettling myths and binaries that were delineated in 1965-1975. However, Contreras argues that like indigenist nationalism, **"**Chicana indigeninst feminism" emerged from a fascination with pre-conquest Mesoamerica, "made possible in part because of a complex history of 'discovering,' excavating, collecting, cataloging, preserving, and stealing" (38). However, other Chicana feminist literary representations expressed a "contra-mythic" indigenism, that is, a more complex and nuanced portrait of Chican@ Indigenous and mestiz@ ancestry. Literary critic Debra J. Blake has noted that Chicana feminist cultural production is often characterized by its engagement with both historical and contemporary renderings of indigeneity (2008).

We can trace the ways in which Indigenous mestiz@s and Chicana feminists have taken up and reconstructed Chicano heteropatriarchal representations of mytho-historical cultural narratives by examining critiques of literary, visual, and performing arts. Examples of these reconstructed narratives include "Aztlán" and female icons such as Malintzín (otherwise known as "La Malinche" and "Doña Marina), La Llorona, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and pre-Hispanic goddesses such as Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui.[18] Cultural critics identify the ways Chicanas resignify these mytho-historical icons in textual and visual sites to re-historicize the real and symbolic narratives that have been used to circumscribe their lives. Blake calls this strategy of rehistoricizing narrative "cultural refiguring." Cultural refiguring, in these terms, "identifies deficiencies and

[18] See Alarcón 1981, 1989; Blake 2008; Candelaria 1980; Castillo 1996; Pérez 2007; Pratt 1993; Román-Odio 2013; Rebolledo and Rivero 1993.

destructive images, ideas, symbols, and practices directed toward women and disenfranchised peoples" (2008, 5). Moving beyond identification, it is a practice that attempts to supplant damaging images with positive and complex representations. Thus, cultural refiguring, which can also be called meta-mythologizing, is an emancipatory theory and lived practice that advocates "social change, visual and symbolic revisions of stereotypes, and everyday acts of women's resistance that occur on a regular basis but often go unheralded and unnoticed. (2008, 5)

In "Border Arte: Nepantla, el Lugar de la Frontera," Anzaldúa explains that this revisionary process occurs when mestiz@ "border artists" deconstruct damaging representations and create "counter art," that is, gendered, ethnic, sexual, spiritual visual counternarratives (2009, 181). She claims that Chican@ artists collectively "re-read, reinterpret, re-envision, and reconstruct her/his culture's present as well as its past" (2009, 183). These processes of cultural refiguring are necessary to decolonial action. Art, literature, dance, theater and other forms of expressive culture have been critical spaces for Chican@s to examine oppressive structures, cultural norms, and personal relationships inherited from colonization. They engage in deliberate acts of (re)defining and (re)creating emancipatory identities that can bring about personal transformation and social change. In "There's No Place Like Aztlán: Embodied Aesthetics in Chicana Art" cultural critic and author Alicia Gaspar de Alba analyzes the "place-based aesthetics" of Chicana artists in order to identify differences between representations of Aztlán in Chicana feminist and Chicano nationalist visual art. She argues that place, specifically the notion of "homeland," is a fundamental aspect of one's identity and is represented through "place-based aesthetics" in Chicana visual art. She defines this aesthetic as an

evolving mythology of place that translates into a "system of homeland representation that immigrants and natives alike develop to fill in the gaps of the self" (2004, 104). Gaspar de Alba argues that Chicana artists such as Patssi Valdéz, Delilah Montoya, and Carmen Lomas Garza have re-presented Aztlán with a "more intimate and embodied connection to place" (127).

Chicana artists, writers, and theorists have transformed conceptualizations of Aztlán from a geographic homeland and place of origin into a symbol of the body/self as the place of origin, producing a politicized and embodied aesthetic. This relocation to the body facilitates incorporation of ethnically diverse mestiz@s including Pilipin@s, Afro-, Asian-, and Caribbean-mestiz@s, Yoeme (Yaqui), and others who may have been excluded from Chicano conceptualizations of Aztlán. Xicana Indígena playwright, poet and theorist Cherríe Moraga's "queering of Aztlán" illustrates this transformation. Moraga remaps a new Aztlán that calls for the decolonization of the female body and mother earth. For her, a Chicano homeland would "embrace all its people," (male and female) and include its "jotería[19]" (1992, 259). Moraga further asserts, "as a Chicana lesbian, I know that the struggle I share with all Chicanos and Indigenous peoples is truly one of sovereignty, the sovereign right to wholly inhabit oneself (cuerpo y alma) and one's territory (pan y tierra)[20]" (1992, 272). Laura E. Pérez has noted that Moraga represents struggles of sovereignty in her play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1999). Moraga seeks a more inclusive and egalitarian Aztlán, a homeland that is not

[19] Jotería refers to queer Chican@s. Queer is an inclusive, unifying sociopolitical term for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersex, gender-queer, or of any other non-heterosexual sexuality, sexual anatomy, or gender identity. The label was reclaimed in the twentieth century as a means of self-empowerment. Queer Chican@s and Latin@s similarly reclaimed the term jotería.

[20] Body and soul, bread and earth.

built on patriarchal and heterosexist ideologies (2007, 200-04). Yarbro-Bejarano advances a similar argument in an analysis of Moraga's plays and essays, illuminating the ways in which Moraga represents the Chicana lesbian body and sexuality as a site of political struggle and of potential liberation (2001). According to Gaspar de Alba, "Instead of dispossession, ownership, or reclamation of a place outside the self," Chicana artists engage embodied aesthetics, which understand "the body as the signifier for place. As such, the body functions as site of origin, bridge between worlds, and locus of liberation" (127). Critics have observed how Chicana artists expand conceptualizations of Aztlán to include the body as homeland, as a site of origin, and a place of queer belonging.

The body came to be acknowledged as a site of critical scholarly inquiry in the 1980s and 1990s. Chicana feminists, queer Indigenous mestizas in particular, were at the forefront of this paradigm shift in the humanities and social sciences through their considerations of the body as a site of knowledge and as homeland. For many, this shift was rooted in a quest for autonomy and sovereignty as Indigenous women. Taking queues from Black and Native American feminists, Indigenous mestizas confronted the objectification and denial of their brown bodies from outside and within their own communities. The "corporeal" or "bodily turn" simultaneously took place in feminist philosophy and in the emerging field of performance studies (Clever and Ruberg 2014).

While Chicana artists and writers have refigured Aztlán, others have revised the images of female icons. In Chicano folklore La Malinche and La Llorona have coalesced into one negative figure of women's depraved sexuality and deficient motherhood, however, Chicanas (re)-present them as complex individual narratives (Pérez 2002;

Rebolledo and Rivero 1993, 192). Norma Alarcón argues, "because Malintzin's neosymbolic existence in the masculine imagination has affected the actual experience of so many Mexicanas and Chicanas, it became necessary for 'her daughters' to revise her scanty biography" (1989, 83). The number of poems and essays written by Chicanas on La Malinche "emphasize the pervasive preoccupation and influence of the myth and women's need to demythify" (Alarcón 1981, 187).[21]

Chicana writers and artists have sought to deconstruct the virgin/whore dichotomy built on the juxtaposition of the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche/La Llorona through reinterpretations of these central female archetypes. In *Sacred Iconographies in Chicana Cultural Productions* Clara Román-Odio examines how Chicanas have used the iconography of the Virgin for social justice in art and literature from 1975-2010. Ester Hernández was among the first Chicana visual artists to appropriate Guadalupe's image in her antiquaint etching *La Virgen de Guadalupe Defendiendo los Derechos de los Xicanos* (1975). Laura E. Pérez explains that multi-media visual and performance artist Patssi Valdez of ASCO, the Los Angeles-based performance collective, worked with the image of the Virgin from 1972 through the mid-1990s (2007, 267). Ester Hernández and Patssi Valdez inspired writers and artists including "Yolanda López, Consuelo Jiménez Underwood, Marion C. Martínez, Santa Barraza, Alma López, Yreina D. Cervántez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros, who transformed the Virgin into a contested site where figurations of identity and alterity are constantly resignified" (Román-Odio 2013, 2). In Chicana cultural production the Virgin is commonly

[21] See Mora 1984; Corpi 1975; Cota-Cárdenas 1985; de Hoyos 1985; Del Castillo 1974; Gaspar de Alba 1989; Gonzales-Berry 1991; Tafolla 1985; Sosa-Riddell 1973; Sánchez-Padilla 1975. These texts have been assembled in *Infinite Divisions: An Anthology of Chicana Literature* in the section titled "Myths and Archetypes" (1993, 189-271).

associated with Tonantzín and Coatlicue, Mesoamerican creatrix, in order to express an indigenous heritage and to empower women to see themselves as sacred beings with the power to act on their own behalf. The use of this iconography then is central to a spiritual project of feminist emancipation (Román-Odio 2013, 17). Advancing a similar argument, Laura E. Pérez states, "In Chicana visual art, creative writing, and theater, the Virgin becomes an archetype of the powerful and empowering in everyday women, who embrace the negatively racialized female body in ways that claim it too as a temple of the sacred" (2007, 259).

Chicanas have also refigured images of Ixtaccihuatl, Adelitas-*soldaderas*, *curanderas*, labor leaders, and ordinary women, transforming them from invisible, submissive, or hyper-sexualized figures and repositioning them as positive, empowered, active heroines and role models (Griswold del Castillo, McKenna, and Yarbro-Bejarno 1991; Ramirez 2002; Rebolledo and Rivero 1993). Ixtaccihuatl, which means white woman in Nahuatl, is the name of a dormant volcanic mountain in Puebla, Mexico that lies north of the active volcano Popocatépetl. In Aztec mythology Ixtaccihuatl was princess who fell in love with the warrior Popocatépetl, which means smoking mountain. She was inaccurately told that her lover was killed in battle and died of grief. When Popocatépetl returned from war, he fell to his knees in agony as he held Ixtaccihuatl in his arms. The gods turned them into snow-capped mountains, where they remain today. There are many versions of this myth, however typical visual renderings of the pair are represented as an Aztec warrior wearing a loincloth and headdress holding a scantily clad dead princess. This image is seen on calendars, lowrider cars, murals and other Chicano and Mexicano cultural production.

**Radical Indigenous Mestizaje**

I have examined key historical and theoretical constructions of Chican@ indigeneity and mestizaje and the ways in which feminists and cultural critics have transformed these categories. Here I ask: what are the nuanced and complex expressions of "contra-mythic" indigeneity Contreras identifies? Can these expressions be read beyond literary manifestations? To answer these questions I explicate and build on existing theories of mestizaje to define a concept I name "radical indigenous mestizaje"––a concept that emerges from a need for new conceptualizations of identity in Chican@ studies and as the theoretical framework I utilize to examine the cultural productions generated by the MdM collective. I highlight some of this literature in order to demonstrate how Indigenous mestiz@s go beyond essentialist constructions of indigeneity and generate new notions of complex multiple identities. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), which became a seminal text, marks a turn in Chican@, mestiz@ and Indigenous cultural discourse and historiography. Drawing from multiple traditions (philosophy, aesthetics and spiritual practices) past and present, and assimilating several genres (poetry, prose, theory, history, myth, and autoethnography), Anzaldúa theorizes the construction of Chicana mestiza identity. Anzaldúa theorizes the "Borderlands" as an in-between space that coincides with, yet goes beyond the physical location of the U.S.-Mexico border. For Anzaldúa, the Borderlands also encompass the psychic, emotional, spiritual, and sexual interstices experienced by Chicanas. Rafael Pérez-Torres argues, "the quest suggested by Anzaldúa's sense of the borderlands is not toward a fixed or rigid identity. The Chicana/o becomes a fluid condition, a migratory self who reclaims not merely the geographic

realm of Aztlán. Instead, Chicanos/as come to be seen as transfiguring themselves—moving between the worlds of indigenous and European, of American and Mexican, of self and other" (1997, 233). It is through this form of consciousness that "the Chican@" itself dissipates. According to Anzaldúa it is insufficient to claim identity solely based on traditional categories such as race, class, gender or geography. In her later work she develops her theory of the Borderlands as "nepantla," which is explained as a liminal space of possibility and a transitional plane of consciousness that occurs in-between life stages and events.

Furthermore, Anzaldúa attributes new meaning to identity construction through her concept of "mestiza consciousness"—a consciousness that emerges from life in the Borderlands. Mestiza consciousness is a cognitive decolonization process of racialized, gendered, and sexed subjects wherein la mestiza becomes aware of the Borderlands and makes conscious decisions regarding the construction of her multiple and often contradictory identities. Through mestiza consciousness—later conceptualized as "conocimiento"—the "new mestiza" rethinks her material, psychic, and spiritual existence as she negotiates contradictions and ambiguities as a *subject-in-process* who is constantly constructing provisional identities. AnaLouise Keating, editor of Anzaldúa's work, succinctly describes Anzaldúa's theory of the new mestiza as "an innovative expansion of previous biologically based definitions of mestizaje. For Anzaldúa, new mestizas are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, sexuality, color, class, bodies, personality, spiritual beliefs, and/or other life experiences. This theory offers a new concept of personhood that synergistically combines apparently contradictory Euro-American and indigenous traditions" (2009, 322). Anzaldúa illustrates

this process through the iconography of La Virgen de Guadalupe who is "the symbol of ethnic identity and of the tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess" (2007, 52). Anzaldúa engages in cultural refiguring as she builds her theories of consciousness and identity construction.

Chicana feminist critics argue that distinct differences exist between Chicano nationalist indigeneity (constructed during 1965-1975) and Anzaldúa's notion of multiple identities and point to the ways in which Anzaldúa lays claim to multiple subject positions, one of which is Indigenous (Yarbro-Bejarano 2006; Saldívar-Hull 2000). Liberation philosopher Norma Alarcón examines Anzaldúa's use of "the Indian/Native" woman in her writing, arguing that Anzaldúa reclaims an Indigenous history without romanticizing or recovering a lost true self. Anzaldúa moves past postmodern understandings of fragmented selves/identities by "'making sense' of it all from the bottom through the recodification of the native woman" (Alarcón 2006, 186). Alarcón argues that Anzaldúa's innovation of "the" Native woman pieces together the historical repression of this aspect of contemporary Chicana identity as it has been constructed through the oppressive virgin/whore dichotomy. Chicana cultural critic Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano asserts that Anzaldúa's framework is too complex to be merely labeled as "essentialist," arguing that the political moves that Anzaldúa makes illustrate the multifaceted identities of those who have been silenced and oppressed, illuminating the complexities of identity formation processes. I argue Anzaldúa constructs "multiple authenticities" through "an act of reclaiming histories and heritages, the right to self-determination and self-naming, and the right to personal expression" (Kodish 2011, 36).

Yarbro-Bejarano claims, "the new conception of the non-unitary self, or mestiza-consciousness, allows for a politics of articulation, not of essential unity or correspondence, but of unities-in-difference" (2006, 88), a process that has potential political implications such as breaking down rigid binaries that affect women's material existence.

Ana Castillo further complicates queer Indigenous mestizaje in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1995). She deploys the term "mestiza/Mexic Amerindian" to assert a U.S. Indigenous, pre-colonial Olmec, Spanish and Mexican lineage. The label "Xicana," Castillo argues, affirms Indigenous ancestry, spirituality and sexuality, and considers other multiple, crosscutting identities. She accounts for and underlines the Arab and North African racial mixing that shaped Iberian culture and the subsequent racial mixture with Indigenous peoples of the Americas during the Spanish Conquest. Castillo critiques sexism prevalent within contemporary hegemonic white Euro-U.S. culture, Mexican Catholicism, and some pre-conquest patriarchal Indigenous cultures, such as the Aztecs. She argues these multiple sites of sexism across time and space have led to the subordination of Indigenous womanhood, and are a result of spiritual imbalance due to the omission of the "feminine principle" (1995, 11). Castillo refutes the Chicano propensity to glorify and romanticize male supremacist aspects of pre-conquest Aztec culture.

Castillo introduces the term "Xicanisma" to refer to a form of Chicana feminism that will allow mestizas/Amerindian women to "not only reclaim our indigenismo—but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness" (1995, 12). In other words, she claims that in order to heal ourselves from historical, institutional, and personal

traumas, we must acknowledge and honor the feminine side of our complementary feminine/masculine duality. To do this, she writes, would restore spiritual balance. This act challenges Euro-U.S. *and* Chicano/mestizo patriarchy, as well as the Catholic Church that rely on oppositional binaries to repress women's spirituality and sexuality. For Castillo Xicanisma is "an ever present consciousness of [Xicana] interdependency specifically rooted in our culture and history" (226). Xicanisma is a practical way for mestiza/Amerindian women to express an indigenous sensibility, reconnect spirituality with the body/sexuality, and (re)claim and (re)construct traditions so long as they serve their current needs as women today. Moraga explains her use of the X indicates "a reemerging política,[22] especially among young people, grounded in Indigenous American belief systems and identities… [that] reflects the Indian identity that has been robbed from us through colonization…. As many Raza may not know their specific indigenous nation of origin, the *X* links us as Native people in diaspora" (2011, xxi). In *Chicana Art* Laura E. Pérez describes the complexity of Chicana's mestiza and Indigenous heritages that are expressed in their art. She notes that Chicanas are often mixtures of not simply one but several different Indigenous peoples from all over the continent, both North and South, some with distant Indigenous lineage and some with a tribally enrolled parent. Pérez points out that Chicana artist's "Native American ancestries include the Mexica ("Aztec"), the Maya, the Purepecha, the Huichol, the Kikapoo, the Tepehuan, the Opata, the Yaqui, and countless other 'northern' tribes. In addition, some have been culturally adopted, so to speak, and taught under the direction of spiritual teachers of tribes not of their own lineages, on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border (2007, 8-9).

[22] Politic or political consciousness.

While some Chicanas know their *specific* Indigenous nation of origin, others do not. However, feminist historians have recuperated matrilineal stories, including those of colonial era criollas, Spanish-Mexicanas, Afro-mestizas and Indigenous women, providing a more complex portrait of Chican@ heritage (Castañeda 1993, 1997; González 1993, 1999; Pérez 1999; Schlissel, Ruíz, and Monk 1988; Veyna 1992, 1993). Studies of music-dance traditions such as los Matachines, los Comanches and danza Azteca in contemporary communities have also added depth to understanding present-day expressive culture and their links to Indigenous and mestiz@ lineages (Cantú 1995; Garcia and Lamadrid 2012; Lamadrid 2003; Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú and Romero 2009; Romero 2002, 2007). This historical recovery work, coupled with personal investigations into family genealogy, has allowed many Chicanas to reclaim the teachings of their diverse mestiz@ and Indigenous communities, thus becoming "Indigenous mestiz@s."

The notion of mestizaje, originally conceptualized in Mexico and the rest of Latin America during the colonial period, has an extensive and convoluted history. In a U.S. context, mestizaje has come to simultaneously invoke and subvert racial categories—it "has become a dominant metaphor for understanding the racial, cultural, social, and linguistic mixing that characterizes life in the borderlands" (Pérez-Torres 2013, 25). Cultural critics Alicia Arrizón (2000, 2006) and Rafael Pérez-Torres (2006) have explored the ways mestizaje is expressed and embodied in cultural production. Their work draws upon Mary Pat Brady's conceptual framework of "transculturation" that makes clear the relationship between mestizaje, social processes, and political systems.[23]

[23] Brady builds on the work of Cuban critic Fernando Ortiz who argues, "transculturation names the process by which a subjugated group simultaneously incorporates and transforms the culture of a dominant group. The colonial process, in which a dynamic of subjugation and domination is at play, does not imply a simple top-down process of control and erasure. Rather, subjugated constituencies maintain a

Pérez-Torres argues that a "critical mestizaje" considers how people live in and through their bodies and ideology. Enacting critical mestizaje for Pérez-Torres "roots cultural production and change in the physical memory of injustice and inhuman exploitation," but also in "desire and transforming love" (2006, 4). Arrizón traces the cultural genealogy of mestizaje in different Spanish (post)colonial and American settler imperialist sites, providing a '"rereading' of mestizaje in a new light, describing the ways it has become an ideology associated with the creation of new subjectivities, identity politics, and the performance of 'subordinated' knowledge" (2006, 3).

The concept I name "radical indigenous mestizaje" is conceived of and deployed strategically as a descriptive term and living cultural practice that intervenes in the legacy of colonial discourse and repressive racial constructs as it makes room for new resistant subjectivities and epistemologies. Radical indigenous mestizaje can be compared to what liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval calls "differential consciousness." In her study of the oppositional-decolonial activities of US third world feminists, Sandoval argues "the citizen-subject can learn to identify, develop, and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to 'break with ideology' while at the same time *also* speaking in, and from within, ideology" (2000, 44). Radical indigenous mestizaje and differential consciousness are expressions of liberatory subject positions that emerge from and work to interrupt and transform dominant conceptualizations of being and relationships within the social order. In "Mestizaje as Method" Sandoval describes these tactics and modes of consciousness as "ethical principles" critical to "Chicana feminist mestizaje" (1998, 360). She goes on to argue "aesthetic works, identified, read, and

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tenuous, though nonetheless real, agency in the development of thought, belief, and action" (Pérez-Torres 2006, 29-30).

interpreted with the analytic tools of differential criticism, are marked with both disruption *and* continuity, as well as by immigrations, diasporas, border crossings, and by politics, poetics and procedures" (1998, 362). Thus, aesthetic works that engage a "radical indigenous mestizaje" must be read as both emerging from and altering prevailing social relations in the name of Indigenous feminist emancipation.[24]

Radical indigenous mestizaje can be read in the work of Chicana artists who derive inspiration from diverse spiritual traditions and iconographies in order to represent their social realities and political concerns. Gloria Anzaldúa names this practice "spiritual mestizaje." She says that as a queer mestiza no single spiritual or religious tradition can encompass her multiple identities, explaining that a spiritual mestizaje "weaves together beliefs and practices from many cultures, perhaps including elements of Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, Santería, and other traditions. Spiritual mestizaje involves the crossing of borders, incessant metamorphosis" (2009, 230). Chicana cultural critic Theresa Delgadillo utilizes Anzaldúa's theory and method to analyze literary and visual texts of Chicanas and women of color, demonstrating how these artists challenge oppressive social norms in order to bring about personal and social transformation (2011). Delgadillo argues that spiritual mestizaje is a "critical mestizaje" because it "contrasts with other kinds of mestizaje and alters the standard or traditional use of the term, which has largely, though not exclusively, used to designate racial mixture" (10). She further argues that the concept spiritual mestizaje "opens up the possibility for analyzing mestizaje as a process in ways that make this term critically productive in the

[24] When produced for decolonizing purposes, communal performances can become what Chela Sandoval, Arturo J. Aldama and Peter J. García call "de-colonizing performatics/the antics of the oppressed." These self-consciously organized performance "acts" intervene in coloniality and imperialism on behalf of egalitarianism, individual and collective liberation, creating de-colonizing effects (2012, 5).

articulation and analysis not only of Chicano/a literature and culture but of hemispheric cultural exchange" (11). Similarly, Laura E. Pérez examined the work of more than forty Chicana visual, performance, and literary artists from the early 1970s through the 2000s and found that they draw from their multiple identities, religious cultures, and personal experiences to create art for social change. Pérez names this practice a "politicizing spiritual hybridity."[25] She illustrates how these artists generate new meanings by connecting "different artistic languages, whether the high and low, the Mexican and the Euroamerican, the European and the Mesoamerican, the popular and the pre-Columbian, the high-tech and the *rasquache* (tacky or improvised), the spiritual and the profane" (2007, 14).[26] By mixing a variety of kindred identities, traditions and influences, Chicana artists produce innovative and hybrid art, with regards to both content and form.[27] Laura Pérez argues the works are " paradoxically, decolonizing cultural appropriations, in part, because the traditions or contemporary practices from American Indian, U.S. Latina/o, Latin American, and African diaspora cultures from which they draw upon… are politically oppositional to (neo)colonizing cultural and religious systems, but also

[25] Pérez argues, "Feminist neopagan, goddess spiritualties, Native American beliefs and practices, Mexican American 'folk Catholicism,' elements from African diaspora *Santería*, Buddhism, decolonizing ethnic minority discourses, and the critique of the Eurocentrism of mainstream and dominant cultural forms, including those of religion and high art—these are all components of the new kinds of cultural hybridity that appear in Chicana art forms that articulate themselves through the spiritual" (2007, 93). Similar Chicana feminist concepts that name the processes of culling from multiple, social justice oriented spiritual traditions include "nepantla spirituality" (Anzaldúa), "Indianizing Catholicism" (Broyles-González 2002), "espiritismo" (Castillo 1995), and "spiritualized feminism" (Fernándes 2003). See also Ruth Frankenberg's 2004 ethnographic study of self-fashioned East-West hybrid religious practices in the U.S.

[26] It should be noted that Mexican, Euroamerican, European, Mesoamerican, and pre-Columbian "artistic languages" should not be read here as singular. Each is comprised of multiple languages, cultural practices and ways of life.

[27] Chicana visual and performance art often utilizes mixed media including, but not limited to installation, weaving, embroidery, fashion, silkscreen, sculpture, photography, sound recording, video, film and digital work, and painting. Likewise, Chicana literature often integrates prose, poetry, history, myth, autoethnography and theory.

because some of these traditions have not been altogether interrupted in the memory or practices of Chicana/o culture itself" (2006, 274).

For over forty years Indigenous mestiz@ artists have culled from multiple, social justice oriented spiritual traditions and engaged in practices that refashion dominant cultural representations and critique social injustices. By underscoring what Roman-Odio calls "the materiality of the body (experience, history, memory, and relational analysis)," these Indigenous mestiz@s recuperate an embodied Indigenous womanhood (2013, 4). Roman-Odio points to the ways artists are integrating spiritual vision with social activism to unsettle globalization, capitalism, (neo)colonialism, heteropatriarchy and other intersectional oppressive ideologies by refashioning new myths, symbols, cultural allegories and spiritual practices. The literature and art examined by Delgadillo, Pérez and Román-Odio articulate "conocimiento"—a "mestiza consciousness"—and provide new ways to conceptualize Indigenous mestiz@ identity and feminist praxis within Chican@ studies. Chicana multi-media artist and cultural critic Amalia Mesa-Baines further illuminates this claim in her observation about Chicana artists active during the Chicano Movement: "Armed with a contemporary understanding of the struggles facing them, these artists used ancestry, ceremony, mass media, social subversion, and critique to fashion an aesthetic and reconstruct ideologically a new language of liberation for themselves" (1991, 140). Through creative-spiritual-political-cultural texts and embodied practices, artists activate a "radical indigenous mestizaje," allowing them to negotiate and reconfigure ethics and belief systems, reconstruct subjectivities and communal histories and transform the collective imagination in the name of social justice. The Mujeres de Maiz can help to further understand "radical indigenous mestizaje."

## CHAPTER III

### Another City is Possible: Cultivating Mujeres de Maiz in Los Angeles

> Speaking and communicating lay the groundwork, but there is a point beyond too much talk that abstracts the experience. What is needed is a symbolic behavior performance made concrete by involving body and emotions with political theories and strategies, rituals that will connect the conscious with the unconscious. Through ritual we can make some deep-level changes. Ritual consecrates the alliance. Breaking bread together, and other group activities that physically and psychically represent the ideas, goals and attitudes promote a quickening, thickening between us.
>
> —Gloria Anzaldúa, "Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island," 154

Inspired by their recent participation in an Indigenous–mestiz@–Zapatista *encuentro* in Chiapas, Mexico and in response to the lack of socially conscious artistic spaces in Los Angeles that featured women of color, Felicia Montes and Claudia Mercado called for local women artist activists, also known as artivists,[28] to gather in the spring of 1997 to organize a Live Art Show.[29] Martha González, cultural critic, MdM member, and lead singer and percussionist of the band Quetzal recalls the impact the encuentro had on her along with one hundred twenty Indigenous mestiz@ artivists from East Los Angeles. González remembers, "The Zapatista anti-imperialist message, as well as the use of a poetry-like approach to communicate their demands to the world

[28] The two first recorded academic citations of the words "artivist" and "artivism" are found in "Chicana/o Artivism" by Guisela Latorre and Chela Sandoval and in "By Any Medium Necessary" by M.K. Asante Jr., both published in 2008. I have heard that Xican@s have used the term in the East L.A. scene since the late 1990s. See also Martha González's dissertation *Chican@ Artivistas: East Los Angeles Trenches Transborder Tactics* (2013) that focuses on the community of musicians in East Los Angeles who use their music as a social justice tool.

[29] For an in depth history of the formation of MdM see the Felicia Montes' master's thesis *Mujeres de Maiz: Seeds to Spiritual ARTivism - a L.A. Art Herstory* (2009).

invigorated the Xicana East LA artistic movement."[30] The group met with the Indigenous Zapatista Mayan community of Oventic to organize the "Encuentro Cultural Xicano Indígena por la Humanidad y Contra el Neo-liberalismo." González says the encuentro was significant because it demonstrated two things:

> One, how music and art could serve as dialectic tools between communities, and two, how the process of collective communal engagement drew out multiple subjectivities between Mayan and Xicano participants. Through communal artistic processes, our differences, although existing in multiple and intersectional ways in our daily life, were highlighted and deconstructed. Relationality and dialogue became the essential after-effect a creative convivial space engenders. As a result, artivista East Los methods and epistemologies reflect this emphasis on relationality and indigenous pedagogies in the use of their art.

In addition to deriving inspiration from the encuentro, Felicia was enrolled in a "Chicano Art" course at the University of California, Los Angeles in the spring of 1997 and saw an opportunity to organize a women's collaborative art show as her final class project.

The participants at the initial organizing meeting at The Aztlán Cultural Arts Foundation in Lincoln Heights were diverse women of color from different neighborhoods in the greater Los Angeles area. Lilia Ramirez, Lisa Rocha, Liza Cohen Hita, Scrybe and Sphear, Aida Salazar and Victoria Delgadillo attended the first meetings. Lilia Ramirez is a multimedia visual and performance artist, poet and curator. She co-founded the Peace and Justice Center (PJC) in 1995 and has been involved in empowering youth through the arts since the early 1990s. Lilia received her BA in 2005 in World Arts and Cultural Studies from UCLA and she co-founded First Street Studios that later became Liliflor Collective Studios. Lisa Rocha is a Native American-Chicana jeweler and visual artist who grew up in the Pico Union and West Adams neighborhoods and commuted to Santa Monica schools. She earned an art degree from Pasadena City

[30] González, Martha. MALCS panel with Felicia Montes and Amber Rose González. California State University, Los Angeles. July 20, 2011.

College with an emphasis in jewelry design and metalsmithing. Lisa met Felicia at a M.E.Ch.A. national conference around the time she began to merge her identities as jewelry designer, MEChista, and Indigenous Chicana. Liza Cohen Hita is a Pinay-Jewish writer and spoken word poet, who also identifies as Filipino, Aklanon, Ashkenazi (Indigenous Filipino), Filipino-Russian or Filipino-Ukrainian depending on the context. Liza graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a BA in Political Science and History, an M.A. in Counseling from Northern Arizona University and a Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Arizona. She is a mother, licensed counselor, dancer, artist, activist and organizer. Scrybe and Sphear are queer Black women singers, poets and filmmakers of the group WADDA G (Women Aware Deep Dark and Gay, of which D'Lo was the third member). Aida Salazar and Victoria Delgadillo were part of the Regeneración Artist Collective with Raul Paulino Baltazar and Zach de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine. This group curated innovative activist art events in the early 1990s. Aida is a writer and a performance and installation artist who grew up in Southeast Los Angeles. She has an M.F.A. in writing from the California Institute of the Arts. Victoria, a multimedia visual artist, has been part of numerous artist collectives since 1981 including ACSO II, she is a founding member of Mexican Spitfires, and has been involved with Self Help Graphics since 1996. Victoria received her B.A. in English Literature and Film in 1973 from the University of San Diego.

MdM founders Felicia and Claudia were members of the newly formed Indigenous mestiz@ spoken-word and performance poetry powwow drum group In Lak Ech, which is the phrase that represents the Mayan philosophy that translates in English to "you are my other self." The other founding members of In Lak Ech are Liza Cohen

Hita, Cristina Gorocica Gallegos, Rachel Elizabeth Thorson Velez and Marisol Torres (Montes 2009, 7). Cristina is a first generation Chicana/Maya/Indígena poet, danzante and singer-songwriter. She attended UCLA where she met Felicia and the other women who would later form In Lak Ech. Rachel grew up in Wilmington and is a Chicana of Mexican, Norwegian, Yaqui, Otomi, German and Yoruba heritage. She studied public art, Latin American art history and Chicano studies while attending UCLA, where she "took a painting class with Judy Baca." Like many of the women of In Lak Ech and MdM, Rachel is primarily a self- and community taught artist. Marisol identifies as Mexicana-Nicaraguense and Chicana. Like Rachel, Marisol came from an artistic family. She has trained in piano, singing and dance since her childhood and in her 20s Marisol began practicing as a visual artist and performing theatre and comedy. She recently received her M.F.A. in writing from the UCLA School of Television, Film and Theater. The women of In Lak Ech would come to spearhead the efforts to establish the Mujeres de Maiz collective.

The newly formed MdM collective decided to organize an intercultural, intergenerational, multimedia event that would combine elements of a music concert, art exhibit, live performances, and ritual ceremony featuring self-identified women of color musicians, dancers, visual artists, poets, actors, filmmakers and spiritual healers. They also decided to publish a literary and arts "zine" to be released in conjunction with the Live Art Show.[31] In their first year together, MdM produced four Live Art Shows, three zines and one documentary that were planned around the changing seasons. The

[31] Zines, short for fanzine or magazine, are do-it-yourself small-scale publications often produced on a shoestring budget by an individual or a collective. Zines are a non-commercial form of independent media that circulates information and communicates personal stories that are often devalued in popular culture, public discourse and mainstream politics.

collective released the first zine "The Birth of la Diosa de Maiz" at the inaugural show, which took place on June 29, 1997 at Centro Regeneracíon, also known as the Popular Resource Center in Highland Park. Claudia recalls the PRC was "an energetic space" where local artivists held meetings, fundraisers, exhibits and artistic events. Two noteworthy groups, Radio Clandestino and the National Committee for Democracy in Mexico, were permanent fixtures at the PRC. Centro Regeneracíon was a hub for Indigenous mestiz@ bands Aztlán Underground, Quetzal, Blues Experiment, In Lak Ech, Ollin and Quinto Sol and musicians Nuke and Omar Ramírez and later Mujeres de Maiz to gather and perform. The space was integral to the development of the East L.A. Indigenous mestiz@ artivist scene in the 1990s. The second Live Art Show and zine release, "Seeds of Resistance," coincided with Día de los Muertos and was held November 9, 1997 in honor of "women in spirit." The show occurred at the Community Service Organization (CSO) in Boyle Heights. In remembering the first Live Art Shows Rachel recalls

> The first MDM show was magic. It was long and unorganized and the lights and settings were anything we could get our hands on. But it was packed and people loved it. I was an MC that night and I was young and so scared and I made so many mistakes, but I had this feeling that I was participating in something monumentally important and it was exhilarating. It was one of the best times of my life. (Rachel Thorson Velez, December 7, 2014, email message to author)

Marisol describes the first shows as "experimental."

> Artists of different backgrounds and across disciplines came together to create new works. Imagine poets, filmmakers, singers, musicians, visual artists, MCs, classically trained dancers and flamenco dancers creating work together to be showcased in front of an audience/community—this was our first year. Visual artists created new work and exhibits for each new live show. We invited artists to meet to dialogue at different homes and venues in an attempt to build a vision for this brand new collective/network.

> The vibe at the shows was always positive and inspiring. Giving the microphone to young women to share was a powerful experience for both the person on the stage and the person in the audience. Audiences lined up out into the street to get into the show and gave the performers and artists a lot of love and encouragement. It felt like community. We had many courageous performers and artists who had common and sometimes similar tragic experiences that were shared through song, poetry and paintings. This was a very healing experience for so many of us. (Marisol Torres, December 7, 2014, email message to author)

Inspired by their powerful experiences at the first two shows, MdM produced the third zine and show "Of Mixed Waters" on March 8, 1998 at the CSO. This was the first show held in honor of International Women's Day, Women's Herstory Month, spring equinox and Mexica new year, which set the precedence for scheduling future shows on an annual basis around these observances (Montes 2009, 32-33). The fourth show "Mujeres de Maiz: The Roots of Herstory" went back to the PRC on August 7, 1998. Like the first three shows, MdM organized an art exhibit featuring the visual art of women of color. Rather than releasing a zine, Claudia directed and produced a documentary that chronicled the first four years of the collective.

Each March thereafter, MdM has published a creative zine that features the literary and visual art of women of color from around the world, and hosted a one-night performance and art exhibit, known as the Live Art Show.[32] The show has become the kickoff event for a month-long series of community workshops,[33] film screenings, art exhibits, high school assemblies, women's ceremonies, and other public events that take place in the greater Los Angeles area. The multi-genre, multi-media Live Art Show

[32] See Appendix D for a comprehensive list of all Live Art Shows with dates, titles and locations.

[33] Workshop topics are typically based on current need or requests from community members. Past workshop topics include "healthy eating," "healing with herbs and plants," "self defense," and "women's health." In 2011 and 2012 MdM organized two workshop series comprised of three to six weekly workshops on "organic urban gardening" and "creative writing." Local experts volunteered their time to lead workshops for a bilingual English and Spanish audience.

draws hundreds of people each year. MdM's mission is "to unite and empower women of all ages, colors, and sexualities by creating safe community spaces that provide art education, mentorship, art exhibition, and publishing opportunities."[34]

The Live Art Show and other MdM events represent the convergence of the various political projects, social movements, and ceremonial circles that MdM members are involved in throughout the year, including La Red Xicana Indígena, La Otra Campaña, Poets Responding to SB 1070, Idle No More, Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle and danza Azteca.[35] MdM is a contemporary grassroots radical women of color collective that works at the interstices of traditionally defined social movements. Indigenous mestiza historian Maylei Blackwell notes that as political subjects with multiple identities, women of color organizing often takes on the following features: "(1) multiple issues in one movement, (2) an intersectional understanding of power and oppression, and (3) the tendency to work in and between movements" (2011, 27). MdM artivists use spiritually and politically charged artistic practices that aim to build community across difference and to create reparative narratives that challenge dominant cultural

[34] http://www.mujeresdemaiz.com/

[35] La Red Xicana Indígena is a network of Indigenous Xicanas founded in 1997 by Cherríe Moraga and Cecilia Herrera-Rodríguez. Based in California and Arizona, the group is involved in political, educational, and cultural projects aimed at raising indigenous consciousness and supporting Indigenous social justice struggles throughout the Western Hemisphere. La Otra Campaña, or The Other Campaign, is a political program created and implemented by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). It is an extension of their twenty-year struggle for recognition and autonomy as Indigenous peoples in Mexico. Poets Responding to SB 1070 is an online collective of activist poets who share their work in response to SB 1070, an Arizona law that targets immigrants through the legalization of racial profiling. Idle No More is a grassroots protest movement that began in Canada in 2012. The Movement calls for Indigenous sovereignty, human rights and recognition of broken treaties. Although the Idle No More campaign began in Canada, it quickly spread throughout North America. The Coyolxauhqui Full Moon Circle is a monthly women's gathering organized by Mujeres de Maiz. Founded in November 2010, the circle is organized around Indigenous teachings of respect, healing, interconnectedness and the notion that women are sacred carriers of knowledge and culture. Many MdM members belong to Danza Mexica groups. The women bring these teachings and practices into the Live Art Show space, along with the discourses and imagery of the aforementioned projects.

representations and critique social injustices. MdM mobilize cultural production to address issues of human, environmental, women's, queer, immigrant, and Indigenous rights.

Mujeres de Maiz is evidence of a direct link to women's collectives that formed in the 1970s and 1980s in California. There is a longstanding and enduring practice of women of color collaborative artistic activism. Native American, Indigenous mestiza and Latina scholars, students and community organizers formed academic, social, political and creative collectives such as the Mujeres Muralistas of San Francisco, Teatro Chicana of San Diego, Hijas de Cuauhtémoc of Los Angeles, and Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), founded at the University of California, Davis.

Indigenous mestiz@ cultural production generated in the East L.A. artivist scene over the past twenty years is both a product of and response to the historical moment in which it emerged. In the 1990s, Los Angeles was a city of civil unrest, a hotbed for political action, and a site of Raza and Indigenous cultural reawakening. As a consequence of de-industrialization and capitalist economic restructuring, L.A. was the most socioeconomically divided city in the U.S. with the highest concentrated populations of urban Indians and Latin@s in the nation. Gentrification was taking place throughout the city, especially in northeastern working-class neighborhoods. The 1992 Uprisings (also known as the L.A. riots) erupted in South L.A. following the acquittal of white police officers in the Rodney King trial and after decades of police violence and other social injustices in Black and Latino@ communities. Conservative propositions in California were used "to contain the power of the new nonwhite demographic majority [and] these propositions served as a model for the rest of the country" (Grosfoguel,

Maldonado-Torres & Saldívar 2005, 16-17). Internationally, the decade marked the official conclusion of the Cold War, peace accords were signed to end the conflict in El Salvador, South Africa repealed its apartheid laws and elected Nelson Mandela as president, the Peace and Dignity Journeys were set in motion, the U.S. entered the "Persian Gulf War" and "Operation Desert Storm," the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was signed, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) rose up against the neoliberal Mexican State. It was in this crucible that Mujeres de Maiz emerged, alongside other Indigenous mestiz@ artivist bands, visual artists, poets, and performers. In his study of the East Los Angeles Chican@ music and cultural scene of the 1990s, cultural critic Victor Hugo Viesca has noted that socially conscious and politically active musicians, visual artists, activists and audiences lead "an emergent cultural movement that speaks powerfully to present conditions." He argues that "it is critical that we consider how these cultural activities reveal an understanding and negotiation of these forces" (2004, 720). Mujeres de Maiz, the focus of this research, is a cornerstone of the urban Indigenous mestiz@ and women of color cultural movements based in Los Angeles, whose influence extends beyond the city limits.

At MdM events, the organizers are often heard proclaiming "todos somos Mujeres de Maiz" on the mic or relaying it in conversation. This phrase is also found in print on their website and social networking sites and in the zine publications. The phrase comes from the Indigenous-Xican@-Zapatista encuentro and translates to "we are all women of the corn." It is an important slogan that summarizes the collective's goals and aspirations. Felicia recalls learning the Zapatista mantras, "everything for everyone" and "We are all Marcos/Ramona (Todos Somos Marcos/Ramona)." She explains, "After the 1994

uprising and especially after the [1997] gathering, Zapatista imagery, *dichos* and philosophy" remain a prominent influence on Xican@ artivist's artistic, political and spiritual practices (Montes 2009, 79). MdM has reinterpreted "todos somos Marcos/Ramona" into a phrase that honors Zapatista philosophy and reflects Indigenous mestiz@ reality in Los Angeles.

Mujeres de Maiz functions as an umbrella collective that brings together established groups and individual artists who then become a part of the MdM extended network. Collaboration is a distinct and intentional feature of the Live Art Show. Younger or less experienced musicians, singers, poets and actors are often paired with more experienced artists. Cross-genre and inter-ethnic collaborations are fortified through MdM and some of the newly formed relationships continue well after the Live Art Show. The Balagtasan Collective, Pinay spoken word artists, and Las Ramonas, a three-member Indigenous mestiza comedy and guerilla theater troupe are two examples of groups that formed and stayed together as a result of their participation in a Live Art Show. Artists are encouraged to experiment with mixing mediums, languages, aesthetics and identities in their performances. The slogan "todos somos Mujeres de Maiz," then, refers to the core founding members, the Live Art Show organizers and the performers who participate each year. These women co-construct and assert multiple subjectivities concurrently—a hybrid urban Indigenous mestiz@ identity grounded in a transnational feminist of color consciousness, politics and aesthetics. While the Live Art Show and other MdM programming targets women and girls of color as the primary audience, the performances are designed to open up meanings in such a way that any audience member can subscribe to Indigenous mestiz@ and women of color politics, consciousness and

aesthetics. People of diverse ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, educational, and linguistic identities, and ages are encouraged, through witnessing the collaborative and innovative performances, to define themselves in relation to others in ways that do not hierarchize difference. Audience members are thus also included in the phrase "todos somos Mujeres de Maiz." Each MdM core member and event organizer has a personal relationship to the collective. An exploration of three of these women's narratives provides additional insight into the inner workings of the collective.

I chose the narratives of Claudia Mercado, Margaret "Quica" Alarcón, and Adilia Torres—all first generation college graduates pursuing advanced degrees in the visual or healing arts. At the time I conducted my fieldwork, these three women stood out as being some of the most active members. I also chose these narrators because their stories provide a chronology of MdM. Each woman joined the collective years apart, but for similar reasons. Moreover, as a founding core member of MdM, Claudia's story is critical to understand the historical significance and inner workings of the group. Felicia is also an active founding core member, however I focus on her story in Chapters One and Five.

**Narratives of Three Mujeres de Maiz**

Claudia Mercado is a second-generation Xicana from Los Angeles. She is a founding member of the creative collectives In Lak Ech, Mujeres de Maiz and Women Image Makers.[36] She has a B.A. in Film Studies from the University of California, Berkeley and is in her final year of an M.F.A. program at California State University, Los Angeles. She considers her L.A. Chicano barrio experiences of cruising and lowriding and going to Dodger Stadium, Chinatown, the alley street scene and local beaches among

[36] Women Image Makers (WIM) is a collective of Indigenous Xicana filmmakers based in Los Angeles. WIM are Maritza Alvarez, Aurora Guerrero, Dalila Mendez, and Claudia Mercado.

the influences on her identity and consciousness. She also considers her visits with family in Mexico as another important factor. Claudia credits "Xicana feministas" Ana Castillo and Gloria Anzaldúa and Black feminists Audre Lorde and bell hooks as instrumental in "solidifying" her "feminismo" and in inspiring MdM. Claudia says her grandmother was particularly influential in shaping her identity as an Indigenous woman:

> My grandmother, she passed, she would have identified as Mexican but also I think she would identify claiming her Indigenous side because her mother was Native. My great-grandmother was Native but she didn't acknowledge it. And she was a straight up soldadera too. My great-grandfather was part of the war and my great-grandmother had her son in the battlefield. By the time she had her third son she was like, "No more. I don't want this life anymore." So the identity of being a revolucionara took precedence over being Indigenous for her.[37]

Unlike her great-grandmother whose role as a soldadera overshadowed her Native identity, Claudia's grandmother practiced Indigenous Mexican customs and beliefs. Claudia remembers how her grandmother influenced her identity and her work as a filmmaker:

> I grew up with my grandmother—the way she lived her life, which was very close to nature—she practiced alternative medicine. People would go to her and she would do what acupuncturists call cupping. I would often be in the room when she would be doing that. Or she was always in her garden; she was always tending her plants. Being with her, and she was very much into cooking authentic Native foods, like corundas. Corundas are native to Michoacán. They're kind of like tamales except that they're like these little masa triangles. And then, of course, her chiles and just all the different dishes. Because I was with her all the time, I knew I wasn't white. I knew I wasn't American. I didn't necessarily have the vocabulary to say I'm Mexicana but I knew I was that. And it was because I hung out with my grandma—I would watch novelas with her and I would be in her garden, I would hear her conversations with other people, I would run errands with her. I was her little assistant. We played, we did everything together. So, I acquired a lot of her worldview, which was very Mexican but also very Indigenous. So she influenced me a lot. She was my best friend.
>
> She was the matriarch of the family, so when she passed away everybody was in the pits. When I found out she had passed away, I never had the opportunity to really mourn her death, I never even talked about it. I just went through the

[37] Mercado, Claudia. Interview with the author. May 19, 2011.

> process and kind of got lost in the shuffle with everybody's sadness. As an adult I had this epiphany. I was in a café and I had a flurry of memories that had been repressed. I didn't even know I had these memories and I started—I honestly felt like I went back in time because I had these memories and I totally relived them. I didn't just remember them. I relived them. And it was such an impacting experience that I ended up making a film about it. In a way, it took twenty something years to finally mourn her death. The short film that I made called "Lagrimas de Café" was to honor her legacy and the things that we would do. One of the things that we would do was drink coffee. So she's always been with me. She's one of my angels that protects me. She's a strong spirit that's always around me. Actually, I have a lot of ancestors of mine that are with me a lot, her being one of them. But it's like her lineage of a lot of the women that have been part of our families—I feel them a lot. They help guide me and if I'm taking care of myself in a good way, I can listen to what they're saying. They're definitely always around me from the mundane things to when I am creating they are there. Even in my dreams, lots of times they manifest in my dreams.

While Claudia does not name the specific tribe or cultural group her grandmother belonged to, Indigenous identity is understood via customs such as healing and food practices and values such as relating to and respecting nature, which were passed on through observation and participation. For me, as urban detribalized women, cultural practices can be a way to lay claim to our "lost" Indigeneity.

Margaret "Quica" Alarcón is a multi-media visual artist and elementary art teacher born and raised in East Los Angeles. She has an M.Ed. and art credential from National University and an M.F.A. from California State University, Los Angeles. Margaret became involved with MdM as the zine editor in 1999 after she completed her B.A. in Illustration. Margaret says that Xicana and women of color visual art and culture influence her artwork and her identity, but these are not the only factors. She states

> It's like a layer. Everybody has so many different layers. I like to say I'm Xicana, but a lot of times it just blends and there's so much about a person. There's so much about me. I'm wearing my Xicana hat but there are other hats I wear too. I guess in my work I don't think about it in terms of that. When I do my personal work I just think in terms of humanity because a lot of times we need that for ourselves. We need to be treated that way. A lot of Mexicanos or Xicanos, we get treated so poorly. Historically it's just been one thing after another and it

> continues—all this racism and xenophobia. All this horrible stuff and it just breaks my heart. My approach is to do what I would like for us or have that state of mind where "this is about humanity, we should be treated this way." So I'm going to treat you this way, or I'm going to treat my work this way. I think that's what we need to talk about more. This is about *humanity*. This is about people struggling for a way of life. This is about the poor, class issues. It's so much more complex than I think many people realize. What I try to do or think about when I do make work is to think about it in a spiritual way—or just beyond all that.[38]

Margaret calls for the term "Xicana" to be more open and points to the ways that this identity is only one of her many "layers." She describes expressing these "layers" in her artwork in terms of "humanity" and points to the connections she feels for others based on struggle and marginalization. Margaret describes the Native American sweat lodge and learning Xican@ and Los Angeles history as influencing her subjectivity, which also inspire her cultural production.

> The lodge has been in my life since I was nineteen and that's helped me to heal myself from personal traumas, just overcoming those things in my life. The Indigenous identity part plays a big role in my upbringing, in my understanding of things, and knowing myself and understanding myself as a person—that has helped me greatly. And knowing and leaning about my history as far as the Xicana history, and even Los Angeles history, which a lot of people don't know about. I barely knew anything and I've lived here [in L.A.] all my life. I've learned a lot about how things came about and how it's affected my microculture or my cultural experience here.

Adilia Elena Torres was born in Guamuchil, Sinaloa México where "there's a statue of Pedro Infante." Her father migrated as a seasonal machinery salesman and brought his family to Sun Valley, California in the 1980s when Adilia was seven years old. She spent her childhood migrating between Guamuchil, Sun Valley, and Cuidad Juarez living for two to three years in each place. As a result of her experiences, Adilia considers herself a "transnational woman" and a "queer Chicana feminist." She earned her B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies with a minor in Critical Psychology from California

[38] Alarcon, Margaret. Interview with the author. July 10, 2011

State University, Los Angeles and she is currently working on her M.A. in Counseling Psychology with a concentration in Community Mental Health at the California Institute for Integrative Studies. Adilia became involved with MdM as Claudia's production assistant at the 2009 Live Art Show. Adilia recalls her time living in Cd. Juarez from age 18 to 21 as a significant life experience that shaped her consciousness:

> It's a border town and during that time it was really about the number of women being murdered. It was crazy every year and I was really young. So I think there I experienced feminism or issues about gender, but not in the way I would've wanted to encounter them. It wasn't necessarily like, "oh, you have to be strong" and stuff like that. Nobody was talking about what was happening. In our school we never had assemblies or never had a dialogue with teachers or the principal. The principal never addressed things like safety or how what was happening to these women was not an issue of class. It's not because women are poor. It's because they're women and they're hated. There was never a conversation about them. None of the teachers ever talked about that. It was as if it was just happening. "Oh, these women are prostitutes and who cares." So I think that's when one of my really good friends Itzel taught me a lot about that in Ciudad Juarez.[39]

Danza Azteca is meaningful practice in Adilia's life. While she was raised "socially Catholic" by her grandmother, Adilia feels as though she spiritually returned "home" with danza.

> From day one, I just felt home. When they burn the copal, something just triggered inside me. My memory remembered something. I can honestly say that it felt like I had been there before because it wasn't foreign to me. I wasn't scared. It felt right, and I mean, dancing—it's hard to dance. I don't claim to be Mexica because, first of all, I'm not from the South of México. I'm from the Northern region so I feel like it was a little different. But I think I understand it, and it feels good to have that. And I don't claim to be any Native American. I do think I'm Indigenous. My dad told me that his mom was Cora. The Coras are from Nayarit, which is right next to Sinaloa. I definitely feel more comfortable, more at home with indigenous practices.

Claudia, Quica and Adilia emphasize a feminist indigeneity as integral to their histories, politics and aesthetics.

[39] Torres, Adilia Elena. Interview with the author. May 19, 2011.

### *"Identity Shifting" in Higher Education*

All three women cite their experiences in higher education as first generation college students as having an impact on their subjectivities. They claim that it was in college where they experienced a "shift" in consciousness about themselves through an examination of social injustices. Claudia attended the University of California, Berkeley where she was

> the first one in my family to leave L.A., to leave home, and to go pursue my education. I was the first one to take off and go to the university. So that was another shift. That was another experience that shaped my identity. I was exposed to diversity of people, diversity of world. I got the tail end of the radical sixties influenced Berkeley, so that influenced me really believing that resistance and uprising can change the world. Fighting for peace is important. It influenced me in the sense that it helped to awaken my consciousness.

Margaret recalls literally "feeling" a culture shock. The effects of social inequalities weighed heavily on her during her first year at the University of California, Los Angeles. She describes later developing a "sense of political consciousness" at East Los Angeles College where she met other like-minded student activists.

> It wasn't until I went to UCLA, I went there for a year after high school, and I started really learning about inequalities. My [high] school was very integrated. It was diverse because it was a magnet school and there were a lot of different cultures, a lot of different people and I was just friends with everybody. I didn't *feel* the inequality as much as I did once I went to college. I thought, "Oh god, everybody's white but me!" I was just this dark person walking down the hall and I just felt really isolated. And I just felt it. It was a really severe culture shock. And at that point I had been sexually assaulted so I had gone through a lot during that year. Then after I ended up at East L.A. College. That's where I picked up a lot of my lifelong friends. I was in M.E.Ch.A. probably more that I actually attended classes (laughs) and that got a little out of hand. But at some point I was able to get to really know myself and find out what I really wanted to do and move forward. That's how I developed a sense of political consciousness a little more. The conspiracy theories and all that stuff—we were all into that. I'm glad I ended up going there. It was a real good time for me too. School had a large impact. I was with like-minded people going into educational fields or using the field of education to get out and do things—that was our goal.

Adilia came to reside permanently in the U.S. at age 21. She did not attend college immediately however, because she was undocumented and could not afford to pay out of state tuition, which was what the law mandated for undocumented students at that time. Adilia later met an undocumented student who attended Cerritos College under the new California law known as AB540, which permitted qualifying undocumented students to pay in state tuition. This meeting changed Adilia's educational trajectory. She remembers:

> I was living in North Hollywood. One day I was like "I'm getting out of here" and I started commuting to Cerritos College. I really liked that school but it wasn't necessarily because the campus is dope. I just really like the people I met there, the community I established there. I think the biggest part of my consciousness happened at Cerritos because there were different groups and organizations. I think we were on the same path.

Adilia says her experiences at a Cerritos College retreat shifted the way she self-identified.

> I think up until community college I identified as Mexicana, or Mexican. I went to a retreat as part of Puente at Cerritos College. I thought it was going to be like any other conference where you pretty much go and talk and they read their essays. I really wasn't expecting what it was. But it was an actual retreat and some of the things we talked about were identity, ethnicity, gender, sexism, racism, xenophobia—all these terms. We were like, "what does that mean?" So I think that was the first time I sort of understood the term national or nationalist. Going to the retreat, that's when I couldn't be the same anymore.

Adilia remembers identifying as Mexicana or Mexican while at Cerritos College. She said she "was still not claiming to be Chicana. On the contrary, when I would hear the word 'Chicana,' I still had these somewhat negative connotations to it. It's too radical. It's too political." It was not until her time at California State University, Los Angeles that she experienced another identity shift and began to claim a Chicana identity.

> Then I came to Cal State L.A. The reason why was I so against it, I think, to me it was that all these kids who claim to be Chicano were born here. I could identify

> with some of the common struggles, but when I was at the retreat I was also able to understand that some kids were born here—second, even third, fourth generation. There was still something that we have in common, but it was hard to connect. So they were claiming this Chicanismo but I felt so disconnected from that Chicanismo. I just remember it was hard because I had just come down from this crazy ass retreat and I'm facing this. Not just the Chicano part, but words like xenophobia that I've never heard in my life. And we did different exercises that I was just like all traumada. I was a little traumatized. Then I met Dionne Espinoza and she is like the face of Cal State L.A. Chicana feminists. I don't know how I met her, but I think I have spirits and angels guiding me because I always end up with really cool people wherever I go. She invited me to the MALCS meeting. Later I took my first Chicana feminism class. I think in that class I came to terms with my Chicanismo. I think after that class is when I started claiming my new identity as Chicana. Not only Chicana, but queer Chicana as well because I read other queer literature. I finally realized why was it that I was so resistant to Chicano. It was when we got to the section on transnationalism, I think it was transnationalist feminisms. Before that I had already been exposed to feminism at Cerritos College 'cause I was part of the feminist majority and stuff like that, but there was always missing a sense of women of color feminisms.

After examining her life experiences and beliefs in college, particularly in a Chicana feminism course, Adilia now identifies as a "queer Chicana" and a "transnational woman." All three women, Claudia, Margaret and Adilia, came to understand and define their identities at different points in their lives and in different ways, but all three cite higher education as having a strong influence in these processes.

***Indigenous Mestiz@ Artivist Circles***

All three women narrate an account of finding Indigenous mestiz@ artivist "circles" in L.A., either through seeking them out or through chance encounters. They describe these circles as a meaningful, healing community of activist artists where they share a sense of belonging. Each woman entered these circles at different times over a thirteen-year period from 1996 to 2009. Claudia's entry occurred in 1996 after she graduated from UC Berkeley. She recalls, "I really didn't want to come back to L.A. but I missed the cultura; it was different in the Bay Area. So I decided to come back to L.A.

and I was looking for the Xicanos who were creating art because I understood myself as an artist, as a Xicana, and I wanted to connect with that community." Once in L.A., Claudia met a group that was organizing a community radio show at the Popular Resource Center (PRC), which was owned by Zach de la Rocha. De la Rocha was lead singer of Rage Against the Machine, an L.A.-based multiethnic hip hop metal band whose music is often dubbed as "radically leftist." Claudia recollects creating and hosting the show "Lucha Por Tu Voz" that focused on women's issues, which she says was lacking in the programming. She remembers, "What I wanted to do was have a show for and by mujeres de la comunidad. I was talking about Xicana feminism, I was talking about cultura, I was talking about spirituality." It was Claudia's participation in the radio show that facilitated her meeting other local Indigenous mestiz@ activists who she would come to collaborate with, one of whom was Felicia Montes. Claudia then organized a group of Xicanas to participate in an event for International Women's Day. That group would become In Lak Ech. Not only did Claudia seek out established Xican@ artist circles to join, she participated in creating new ones that would become part of an extended network of interconnected circles.

Margaret describes the importance of "community circles" in L.A. and how the MdM circle has been particularly significant in her life.

> When I graduated I felt like I didn't accomplish anything. I felt very strange and I felt very isolated. I had a dream just before I graduated about making a corn woman—a woman lying down with corn coming out. I painted it as a tiny painting for an exercise and I showed it to the girls [the MdM core members]. We were part of the same community, the same circles. Felicia somehow got a hold of it and came over to my house and was like, "this is great stuff!" They were so excited about my paintings. I didn't think much of them but I was really depressed during that time so in a way Mujeres de Maiz kind of saved me because I was kind of lost. I didn't feel like I was connected to anything. I didn't feel like I had any roots anywhere. I feel like that's important for people to have that sense.

> When I saw the first [Live Art Show] performance in 1998 at the CSO I was blown away.

Margaret says she felt isolated and devalued in her mainstream art program. MdM was an Indigenous mestiz@ artivist circle that provided a sense of validation for her own work. It also offered an opportunity to support and promote other contemporary women of color artists, which was important to her because

> The only women we knew about [in art school] was Frida Kahlo. I mean, come on, she can't be the only artist. And Mary Cassatt. Ok, two people. Women just don't get any play. I recently saw a film about how all these women tried to create their art and really create a space for it and push through to the mainstream art world and it was really hard for them. To this day it's all very male. It's a man's world. And in the MFA programs women are there. The percentage of women is so much higher in fine art but you end up having the complete opposite effect. Mostly men are the ones running everything. There are more women coming forward, pushing forward trying to gain ground but we still have a long way to go. So that's why Mujeres de Maiz really was important to us. We were able to give a voice to people who didn't have it. On top of all that you have women of color who are trying to get into the [art] scene, which is literally unheard of, very few if anything. Those hurdles are there; those walls are still there.

In 2008 and 2009, while Adilia was attending Cal State L.A., she attended various performances and educational events throughout the city where she encountered Indigenous mestiz@ artivist circles. She remembers meeting

> artists who claimed to be Indigenous or Xicana or poets or you name it. There were all these big circles and all these women. So somehow my consciousness, my spirituality, and the art all came into this circle because all these women, not only do they move in similar circles, but I think they all sort of share the art and spiritual sense of being. But not only that, but connecting all that to their art and to their performance.

In her capacity as program coordinator for the Women's Center, Adilia invited Claudia and Women Image Makers to her campus for a film screening in honor of Women's International Week. A panel with the filmmakers followed the screening where the

women discussed art, spirituality and Indigenous identity. It was after that event Adilia became involved with MdM. She explains that she was attracted to MdM because

> it just became like this circle of connecting art, poetry, music, and indigenismo and feminisms as well, queer—also our queerness. All this was just embedded. I remember once [at a MdM event] my friend asked if any of the women of In Lak Ech identify as queer or something to that nature. I remember Felicia answered, "some of those women are all that: queer, mujer, indígena, this and that. But not all of us are. In this group we have women who identify with all that." I thought that was really neat because there's not that many places where you can shift. Even in danza, sometimes I'm like, I'm a woman but it's hard to say I'm a queer woman 'cause I don't know how the elders are going to take that. But in the end, you could be all that in that [MdM] space and feel safe. I don't think it's the same with all the circulos that I'm a part of.

Adilia points out how one is able to safely and comfortably bring all aspects of herself into the MdM circle—mujer, Xicana, queer, artist, Indigenous, poet, feminist, activist—which she describes as a unique feature compared to other circles in L.A. She remembers her favorite aspect of her first MdM Live Art Show was "to see different people of all ages in one room without fighting, without being disrespectful," having a great time in an alcohol-free environment. She continues, "I've never felt such great energy in one room. I think it was such a magical place, too, my first year."

***MdM Provides***

Over the years Mujeres de Maiz has provided a variety of resources, both tangible and intangible, for those involved in the circle including organizers, performers, and audience members. Margaret noted how MdM "saved" her because it provided a place of belonging and validation. For Adilia, the MdM circle was a space of spiritual and physical healing when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She became close with the core members, recalling

> when I got sick, when I was diagnosed, I reached out. I remember talking to Felicia. The woman who has helped me the most has been Claudia. I think in

> many ways I'm alive because of her. For me, it was a place for healing and also spirituality because I went to more ceremonies. Not just sweat lodge because there were also pipe ceremonies, and healing ceremonies and things like that that I had never been to. That was really nice. And yet, still combining the art. I remember that I just had surgery when they had Susana Baca [at the Live Art Show in 2010]. I had surgery like a week before but I wanted to be there. I wanted to be there and I felt really good. I felt really happy to be there. I had a lot of energy and I think that's what it is. If you're in that place, and if you're sad, it kind of goes away. And when you leave that place and the event is over, you're satisfied. There's something and it's like right here in your chest [places fist over her heart]. You don't know what it is but it just feels like that. You feel so inspired and you want to go write, and you want to go sing, you want to go dance. I remember you [Amber] saying that, "oh wow, I never felt this before!" It's like you went through your own healing process through the art, through the stories you wanted to write about. Even when someone reads the zine, it's very powerful. I think MdM has been a place for me of healing and I like to commit to the work because it's a necessity. If MdM disappears, it would be a great loss, I can't imagine not having MdM.

Due to the carefully procured method of organizing the content of the Live Art Show and other events, individuals are able to connect with the various aspects that matter to them. Claudia succinctly explains

> Mujeres de Maiz provides a space, an outlet of voices that speak of something [the audience] cannot find in popular culture. [MdM artists and performers] speak about alternative health, they speak about spirituality, we speak about connection to nature, we speak about connection to cultura, we speak about community and family. We provide a space that puts values on the forefront of how to be a better human being, or how to become a better person. Reaching, targeting, primarily women. It's giving women a space to talk about their issues. To talk, see, or to hear these voices where nowhere else is being heard. There's no space for them. So I think some people are attracted to [the Live Art Show] because it's about cultura. Some people are attracted to it because it's about spirituality. People are attracted to it for different reasons.

The audience comes to the Live Art show to share the energy put in motion by MdM, and to participate in an urban women of color-centered healing ceremony spearheaded by Indigenous mestiz@s. MdM is an extended network, a circle of belonging that is not utopian but centers around hope, affirmation and dignity. It is a space of possibility to envision another city and another world and to enact that vision, if even for a moment.

## CHAPTER IV

### Violence and Love in the Mujeres de Maiz Zine

Since their 1997 inception Mujeres de Maiz have released literary and arts "zines" in conjunction with Live Art Shows.[40] Zines, short for fanzine or magazine, are do-it-yourself small-scale publications often produced on a shoestring budget by an individual or a collective. Zines are a non-commercial form of independent media that circulates information and communicates personal stories that are often devalued in popular culture, public discourse and mainstream politics. The MdM zines feature the original poetry, prose and the visual art of self-identified women of color. They are a platform for writers and artists of all abilities, from novice to professional. This chapter is a cultural critique of the 13th anniversary MdM zine *Flor y Canto: 13 Baktun Return of the Wisdom of Elders,* which is a compilation of past zine entries originally published between 1997 and 2009.[41] The editors of *13 Baktun* created a new dialogue between authors and artists by republishing their work in the anniversary issue.

In this chapter I analyze *13 Baktun* as both aesthetic object and socio-historical document. Doing so provides insight into contemporary Indigenous mestiz@ and women of color consciousness, politics and grassroots modes of media and artistic production. I begin by situating MdM zines within the historical context of women of color literary production, with a focus on alternative non-commercial publishing practices. I then

[40] Adela C. Licona (2012), Cynthia G. Franklin (1997), Stephen Duncombe (1997) and Red Chidgey (2013) have been instrumental in shaping my thinking about zines.

[41] As of March 2014 twelve issues have been published. While there was a gap in publication from 1999 to 2005, MdM has consistently published an annual zine from 2006 to 2014.

discuss zines and poetic forms in building this women of color literary movement, with a brief discussion of audience and readership. This chapter also includes a description of Chicana literary criticism, which informs my reading of *13 Baktun*. In my reading, violence and love are the central motifs in *13 Baktun*. They appear as complementary elements, that is, as a dualism that constructs the overarching frame of the zine. We see how this frame of violence and love encompasses other sub-themes such as cultural memory, food practices, healing, religion, spirituality, place and the city, ethics, political inclusion and belonging. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the community that is generated through reading the zine, and my reflections on *13 Baktun* as a cultural intervention.

**A Legacy of Alternative Publishing Practices**

An analysis of *13 Baktun* calls for a discussion of the historical legacy of Indigenous mestiza and women of color alternative publishing practices. You will recall that in Chapter Two I demonstrated that Chicano cultural nationalism, while radically anti-assimilationist and anti-racist, often relied on masculinist and heteropatriarchal ideologies. Consequently, Chicano aesthetic productions marginalized women's experiences and concerns (Chabram-Dernersesian 2006; Quintana 1996). Simultaneously, a faction of the Women's Liberation Movement neglected to recognize women's racial and class differences (Cotera 1997; Sánchez 1985, 5-6). Indigenous mestiza feminists responded by taking a decolonial stance in their creative work through renovating themes such as sexuality, spirituality, family and ecology. These women redefined their subjectivities not only in resistance to the repressive aspects of Chicano nationalism and to hegemonic feminism, but also in solidarity with an emerging U.S.

third world feminist consciousness.[42] Chicana literary critic Alvina E. Quintana (1996) notes how this contentious history gave rise to new aesthetic opportunities for women of color writers to develop alternative forms of artistic production to represent their political subjectivities.

Cultural activism and creative expression long provided a path to empowerment and social transformation for women of color. Writing and publishing have been important acts of survival and healing and a way to (re)construct subjectivity. For colonized peoples, writing has been a political weapon of decolonization wielded to generate reparative narratives and images that produce alternatives to dominant cultural representations. Chicanas in particular have fashioned autonomous cultural productions and have contributed to a legacy of community-based feminist of color publications.[43] Historian Maylei Blackwell argues that Chicanas historically have bridged geographic, political, generational and ideological distances among one another through "print-mediated exchange" (2011, 133). Chicanas deliberated at campus and community meetings and conferences and subsequently circulated their ideas in newspapers, journals, pamphlets and magazines, which were often republished and widely circulated. Blackwell argues that these "print mediated discussions not only built new critical

[42] U.S. third world feminism emerged in the 1950's as women of color in the United States came to recognize their interdependence and solidarity with third world women across the planet. More than a mode of consciousness, U.S. third world feminism is a lived theory and a method or tactic of oppositional political action, all of which question and seek to change the dominant social order.

[43] Examples include *Mango,* a community journal edited by Chicana feminist poet Lorna Dee Cervantes and "la mujer" special edition of *Chisme Arte*, a publication of the Concilio de Arte Popular, a statewide Chicano arts advocacy group in California. Other examples include *Tongues Magazine* an online 'zine published by and for queer women of color in Los Angeles and *malintZINE*, an online 'zine by radical/women/queer/people of color based in Tucson. Others include grassroots student-generated publications including a newspaper published by Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc at California State University, Long Beach, which was the impetus for the journal *Encuentro Femenil* and *Coyolxauhqui Remembered: A Journal of Latina Voices* out of San Francisco State University. For a discussion of community-based feminist publications see Garcia 1997, 8.

interpretive communities; they, along with caucuses and conferences, constituted a Chicana counterpublic" (134). Building on feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of Jürgen Habermas, Blackwell defines counterpublics as "parallel discursive arenas where those excluded from dominant discourses 'invent and circulate counter discourses, so as to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs'" (134). Historically zines have served as a print mediated space for Chicanas and other marginalized groups to create and legitimate "counterpublics."

In her study of third-space queer and feminist of color zines, Adela C. Licona (2012) argues that these action-oriented, multiply voiced, coalitional publications work to raise consciousness, reeducate and redefine community and mobilize social transformation and social justice. "By challenging, reimagining, and replacing exclusionary and oppressive discursive practices," she contends, "'zines perform new expressions of subjectivity" (Licona 2012, 2). Thus, zines produced by feminists and queer people of color can be important sites of cultural intervention. This chapter identifies the specific and localized subjectivities and political interventions that take shape in *13 Baktun.*

Women of color contributed to the artistic, literary and political expressions of the 1960s and 1970s. However, their writing was published more extensively beginning in the 1980s in anthologies, often under the direction of Indigenous mestiza editors (Anzaldúa 1990; Anzaldúa and Keating 2002; Hernández and Rehman 2002; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Lesbian voices, often silenced during the Power Movements, also emerged in greater numbers. Anthology editors, academics and public intellectuals alike, continued to rely on collaborative publishing practices of mixed-genre narratives that

were characteristic of the 1970s. Indigenous mestizas demonstrated their solidarity with women of color by providing a platform for the expression of diverse voices and experiences, allowing women to speak for themselves while simultaneously creating a collective feminist of color voice and vision. Americanist literary critic Brian Norman argues, "the act of putting together an anthology works against isolation imposed on women by dominant culture, and the male-dominated machinery of cultural production" (2006, 50). For example, *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002), edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, marked two decades of women of color anthologizing and the desire to continue to collaboratively reinvent individual and collective identities, theories and future visions in a "print-based collective space" (Norman 2006, 39).

The production of non-commercial grassroots zines and women of color feminist anthologies contributed to a literary movement that not only generated new forms of knowledge that influenced both public interest and academic curricula, they were a "tool for self-preservation and revolution" and a catalyst for political action (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, xxiv). In "Art in América con Acento," Cherríe Moraga (1994) describes the political climate in which women of color were writing, underscoring how conservative Reagan/Bush era policies led to the dismantling of cultural centers and "minority" publishing houses across the country. The Reganites also significantly cut governmental funding for the Arts and Humanities. Queer, working class, and women of color writers faced an unforgiving climate of censorship. Ana Castillo asserts that the "white supremacist censorship" of mainstream publishers led to the marginalization of writers whose work did not reflect dominant experiences (Castillo 1995, 4). Frances

Payne Adler, Debra Busman, and Diana García, scholar-activists and founders of the Creative Writing and Social Action Program at California State University, Monterey Bay, contend, "writing about or expressing one's reality can be a form of social action when one's identity does not conform to societal norms …because they are part of the larger political issues that require action" (2009, 2). They describe "social action writing" as a politically engaged form of critical inquiry and a distinct genre of creative writing that: 1) refuses silence and erasure; 2) reclaims personal stories and community histories; 3) bears witness to lived experiences; 4) claims power in speaking one's truth; 5) confronts injustices of all kinds, whether explicit or implicit; and 6) works to raise consciousness and inspire action.

Poetic forms have played a central role in women of color social action writing, particularly within the medium of zines. Despite limited financial resources and censorial impediments faced by community-based authors and publishers, literary zines that showcase original non-fiction and poetry can communicate a message quickly with minimal production costs. Moreover, because women of color are regionally, culturally and linguistically diverse, they often utilize a combination of dominant and colloquial language systems.[44] Postcolonial scholar and literary critic Rafael Pérez-Torres notes how "Chicano culture—particularly poetry—moves both through the gaps and across bridges between numerous cultural sites: the United States, Mexico, Texas, California, the rural, the urban, the folkloristic, the postmodern, the popular, the elite, the traditional, the tendentious, the avant-garde" (1995, 3). Literary zines allow for the creative

[44] For Chicanas these include but are not limited to: Standard American English; English slang with various regional distinctions; standard Spanish; dialectical or regional Spanish including caló; Spanglish; and Indigenous languages including but not limited to Nahuatl and Mayan (Candelaria 1986, 73; Anzaldúa 2007, 77).

expression of multilingual voices and multiple subjectivities that are often silenced by dominant commercial culture and corporate mass media. Liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval points out that "Since 1970 feminists of color have argued that individual and social change will only occur when those who have been relegated to silence find access to political speech—and to one another" (2010, 3). Zines are one important site where women of color have accessed the power of speech, language, writing and community.

Writing and reading are a "collaborative affair" at making meaning—an "intimate interactive relationship" in which the writer imparts meaning onto the text and the reader in turn, creates meaning and makes connections to the text based on his or her own social locations and personal experiences (Anzaldúa 2009b, 168). Like their artivist predecessors, the authors in *13 Baktun* composed embodied narratives or "theories in the flesh" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 23).[45] This type of writing is composed from the body, that is, it is written from sensation and personal experience, which leaves lasting imprints on both the paper and on the audience it engages, creating an "embodied community" (Piepmeier and Zeisler 2009, 18). For women of color writers, finding and defining an audience has been an essential part of the writing process (Herrera-Sobek 1995; Martín-Rodríguez 2003).

Feminist of color literature is mixed-genre, multi-vocal and often addresses personal and social issues. Feminist writers of color simultaneously resist and are influenced by dominant culture, while also affirming various non-Western traditions. Chicana cultural critic Tey Diana Rebolledo asserts that Chicana literature is informed by popular culture, oral traditions and folklore, which "often places the poem or the

[45] Similar concepts for embodied narratives generated by women of color include: "organic writing" (Anzaldúa 1983); "the erotic as power" (Lorde 1984); and "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1998).

narrative into a historical/cultural context as well as adding a mythic dimension to the work" (1995, 5). Women of color anthologies are complex narrative configurations that produce collective cultural histories in the name of social change. Thus, the interdisciplinary nature of women of color writing calls for interdisciplinary modes of analysis (Candelaria 1986; Herrera-Sobek 2000; Quintana 1996).

I employ the interdisciplinary interpretive practices developed by Chicana cultural critics in analyses of *13 Baktun.* Along with Mary Louise Pratt, I understand Chicana writing to be a form of auto-ethnographic expression. In "Arts of the Contact Zone," Pratt coins the term "autoethnographic text," which she defines as a "text in which people describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (1991, 35). Pratt argues that these texts engage and appropriate both colonial and subaltern expressions in order to "intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding" (1991, 35). I thus deploy what Alvina E. Quintana calls an "ethnographic" approach to literary analysis. In *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices* Quintana uses "thick description" to conduct close readings of published narratives that recognize creative resistance, "beyond celebratory and descriptive readings of art" (1996, 28). I also rely on critical reading strategies that understand the individual writer as part of a larger socio-political and historical milieu (Pérez-Torres 1995; Rebolledo 1995; Sánchez 1985). While individual author's biographies would certainly provide depth in the examination of the zine, incorporating biographical information is outside the scope of this project.[46] My analysis of *13 Baktun* is based on a close reading and thick description. I evaluate an assortment of images and creative writing in order to locate the ways in which memory,

[46] I interviewed four members of MdM who published poetry or art in *13 Baktun*. I was able to interview the artists in these instances, but did not actively seek out other contributors. Published interviews with artists were used when available.

cultural phenomena and individual and collective identities are produced, transmitted and represented in the zine.

**Reading *Flor y Canto: 13 Baktun Return of the Wisdom of Elders***

It is important to first examine the title and cover art, which act as the reader's introduction to the zine (see fig. 8). The full title of the anniversary issue is *Mujeres de Maiz Flor Y Canto, 13 Baktun: Return of the Wisdom of Elders*. Flor y Canto, translated to "flower and song" in English, is the Spanish translation of the Nahuatl difrasismo "in xochitl in cuicatl." A stylistic device often found in Mesoamerican languages, difrasismo is the combination of two words to produce a new metaphorical meaning.[47] In the pre-colonial period xochitl, or flowers, were often used as devotional offerings to ancestors and to the gods, a tradition still practiced today. Xochitl is also a modifier to indicate that something is precious or delicate. When paired with cuicatl, song or music, the expression becomes a difrasismo for "poetry." Philosopher Victor Sanchez, author of *The Toltec Oracle*, argues that according to the ancient Toltec, "in xochitl in cuicatl" is about "the magical capacity to transcend the limitations of reason and the physical world, connecting with everything surrounding us in a way that is beyond space and time" (2004, 211). Thus, the use of flor y canto in the title connotatively implies the author's belief that poetry facilitates a path to knowledge beyond the rational and the material. The oral tradition of flor y canto is the antecedent to the corrido form, which is "communal more than personal, written for the ear more than for the eye, and concerned with the communicative more than with the expressive aspects of language" (Sánchez 1985, 17). The expression also acknowledges a connection to the Chicano Renaissance,

[47] See Garibay's *Llave del Náhuatl* and Arteaga's chapter on "Mestizaje/Difrasismo" in *Chicano Poetics* for an in-depth discussion of Nahuatl difrasismo.

when the phrase was widely used to describe Chicano poetry. Flor y Canto was also the name of the popular Chicano literary festivals that took place in the 1970s throughout the Southwest.[48]

The next segment of the zine title is "13 Baktun." Dominant media renderings construct 13 baktun as a date that marks the apocalypse. However, these representations are based on contemporary (mis)interpretations of the pre-colonial Mayan calendar. According to the Mujeres de Maiz, Archaeologist David Stuart and many contemporary Mayan elders and teachers, December 21, 2012 marked the end of 13 baktun, but not the "end of days."[49] The narrative introduction to the zine begins with an epigraph by Wakatel Utiw (or Wandering Wolf), also known as Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj, a Quiche Mayan high priest and leader of the National Mayan Council of Elders in Guatemala. The editors use Wakatel Utiw's words to explain their hope that the current moment, the end of 13 baktun, also known as the fifth sun, is a time of transition where "The world is transformed and we enter a period of understanding and harmonious coexistence where there is social justice and equality for all. It is a new way of life" (2010, 1). The editors declare, "We wish to honor the teachings and wisdom of our elders and ancestors and to welcome the dawn of a new age of enlightenment and hope" (1). For MdM, 13 baktun is a time of metamorphosis that draws from this form of elder wisdom, a Quiche Mayan elder and teacher in this particular example, in order to transform the self, the individual and collective spirit and the social order. We shall see later that zine

[48] Alurista 1976.

[49] Chappell, Bill. "Maya Expert; The 'End of Times' Is Our Idea, Not The Ancients," *National Public Radio*, December 12, 2012, http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwoway/2012/12/20/167626648/ maya-expert-the-end-of-times-is-our-idea-not-the-ancients.

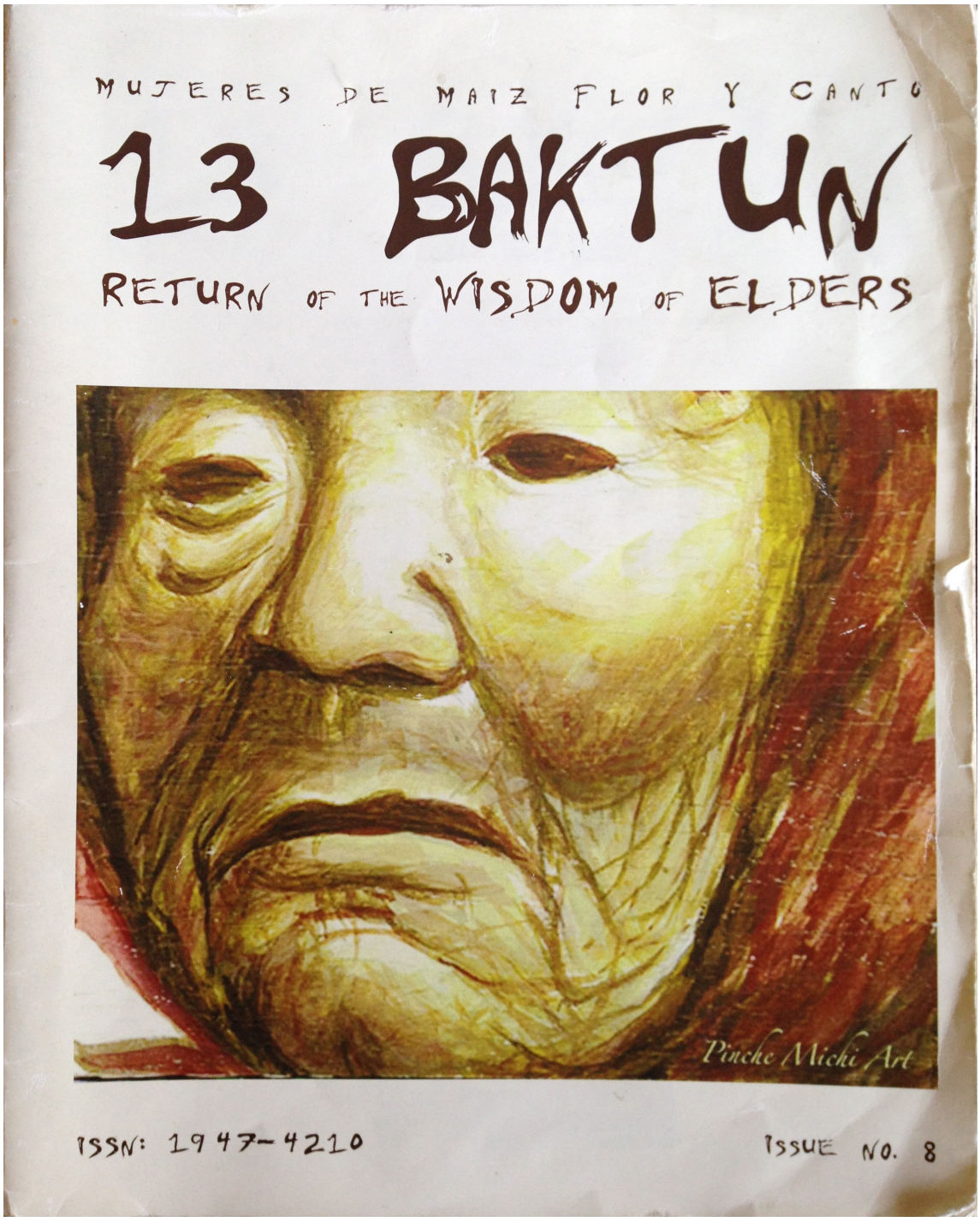


Figure 8. *Mujeres de Maiz Flor Y Canto 13 Baktun: Return the Wisdom of Elders* anniversary issue zine, 2010. Cover art Juarez Taylor, Michelle. *Old Woman Mask*, oil on wood, 2003.

contributors draw on the wisdom of various Indigenous traditions throughout the hemisphere and across the globe.

The subtitle of the zine is "Return of the Wisdom of Elders." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the meanings of the act "to return" is: "to happen or be experienced again" and "to change or turn into something else; to become again." The zine subtitle "Return of the Wisdom of Elders," points to an embodied condition/practice and an immaterial quality that comes back *again*, which *becomes* again through the acts of creation and interpretation of the text. In the context of performance studies, Richard Schechner has called this practice "twice-behaved behavior."

The cover image "Old Women Mask" (2003), oil on wood, is by Michelle Juarez Taylor (also known as "Pinche Michi"). The close up of the old woman's face exposes the creases and cracks in her olive-colored face. With pursed lips and a solemn expression, she focuses her dark almond eyes intently towards the distance. When read alongside the zine title, the image suggests that there is something here to be learned, that wisdom will be uncovered, will become again, when the woman's mask is symbolically removed when the zine is opened and reading commences. The cover page then, is a primer to the wisdom of elders. In what
follows I examine the ways in which violence and love are represented in *13 Baktun.*

**Violence and Love: Textual and Social Realities**

Violence against women is exhibited in seven stories. These consider topics of femicide[50] in Cuidad Juarez, Mexico; genocide and colonization in the Muslin diaspora and across the Indigenous Americas; rape and sexual harassment in San Francisco;

[50] Femicide is the killing of a woman or girl. More recently the term has been used to describe the misogynistic killing of a woman or women by a man.

restrictive gender norms and repression of women's sexuality; and intra-ethnic emotional harm. Taken together the poems and images tell stories of interpersonal and collective forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence. Many of the authors express feeling the cultural loss and ghosting of their ancestors. These represent the pain and sorrow as carried in female bodies, hearts and psyches as ancient. These artistic works express diasporic Indigenous histories of loss and mourning and offer an expanded definition of kinship. While the narratives are primarily grounded in Indigenous experiences on this continent, those remembered are all peoples who have suffered across the Americas, across the planet, and across generations. The authors express a desire to heal the intergenerational traumas that they bear, revealing different coping mechanisms including speaking secrets, physical resistance, purging and forgetting. A critical and interconnected element of violence is love, which, for all women of color, can be understood as a decolonial healing force.

Nine poems and images communicate varied expressions of love for women including endearing relationships between granddaughters and grandparents and daughters and mothers, intimate relationships between female lovers and female friends, and love and care of the self. Cultural critic, feminist theorist and poet bell hooks identifies categories of love in *All About Love: New Visions* (2001). The categories are: divine spiritual love, ethical love, communion/community love, romantic love and healing redemptive love. The type of love I am concerned with highlighting here, which is evidenced in *13 Baktun*, is a radical decolonial love theorized and practiced by third world feminists.

Decolonial theorist and liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval identifies the concept and practice of decolonial love in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). In the chapter "Love as a Hermeneutics of Social Change, a Decolonizing *Movida*," Sandoval reveals how third world writers of social change including Ché Guevara, Franz Fanon and Gloria Anzaldúa "understand 'love' as a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a liberatory mode of consciousness and "its accompanying technologies of method and social movement" (2000, 139). Drawing on Roland Barthes' theorization of love as an example to understand this mode of consciousness and its techniques, Sandoval argues, "It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political '*movidas*'—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being" (140). These *movidas* or tactics, she writes, include various forms of resistance and modes of "oppositional social action," all of which "variously etch upon dominant social reality, language, narrative—upon the neocolonial postmodern global" (146). In *Communion: The Female Search for Love*, bell hooks argues third world feminists have moved beyond patriarchal paradigms of love and have developed "a deeper understanding of love as a transformational force demanding of each individual accountability and responsibility for nurturing our spiritual growth" (2002, xx). hooks describes love as the ethical practice of "choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give all to relationships; by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and out fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet" (2001, 87-88). According to Sandoval and hooks romantic love is not the source, although it can be a part, of decolonial love. hooks argues that romantic love is "an aspect of our overall work to create loving bonds, circles that

love that nurture and sustain collective female well-being" (xxi). Here I have provided a summary of violence and love as social and textual realities. I now turn to an examination of representations of violence in the zine.

***Reading Violence***
***Yreina D. Cervantez's "Lamento Cihuateteo/Llanto de Juarez"***

The first entry behind "Old Woman Mask" is an image and a short poem both by Yreina D. Cervantez—a second generation, Kansas-born Chicana multi-media artist and professor at California State University, Northridge.[51] The silkscreen print depicts a crying woman lying naked atop a bed of skulls (see fig. 9). Detached hands carefully cradle her head and pelvic area as butterflies rise from her mouth filling the vanilla and lavender tinged sky. A cross, connected by sprawling roots, ascends from her abdomen and Mesoamerican stylized flowers protrude from three points. Two-headed serpents (called *coatl* in Nahuatl) wrap around the cross. In many ancient Mesoamerican and some contemporary Indigenous cultures, serpent is regarded as a portal between two worlds. A pair of closed eyes float in the sky above her. The first line above the poem reads: "Dedicated to the women of Juarez." Below the dedication is the website www.aprayerforjuarez.org, which is an appeal to the reader to find additional information on femicide in Cd. Juarez. But her poem says it all: gendered violence in the border town, a byproduct of patriarchal global capitalism, has permeated the lives of women, their families and the local community for two decades. The mass murders of women and girls are thought to have begun in 1993 and are memorialized in Cervantez's art and poetry.

[51] Cervantes, Yreina D, "About the Artist," accessed January 2, 2014, http://yreinacervantez.webs.com/.

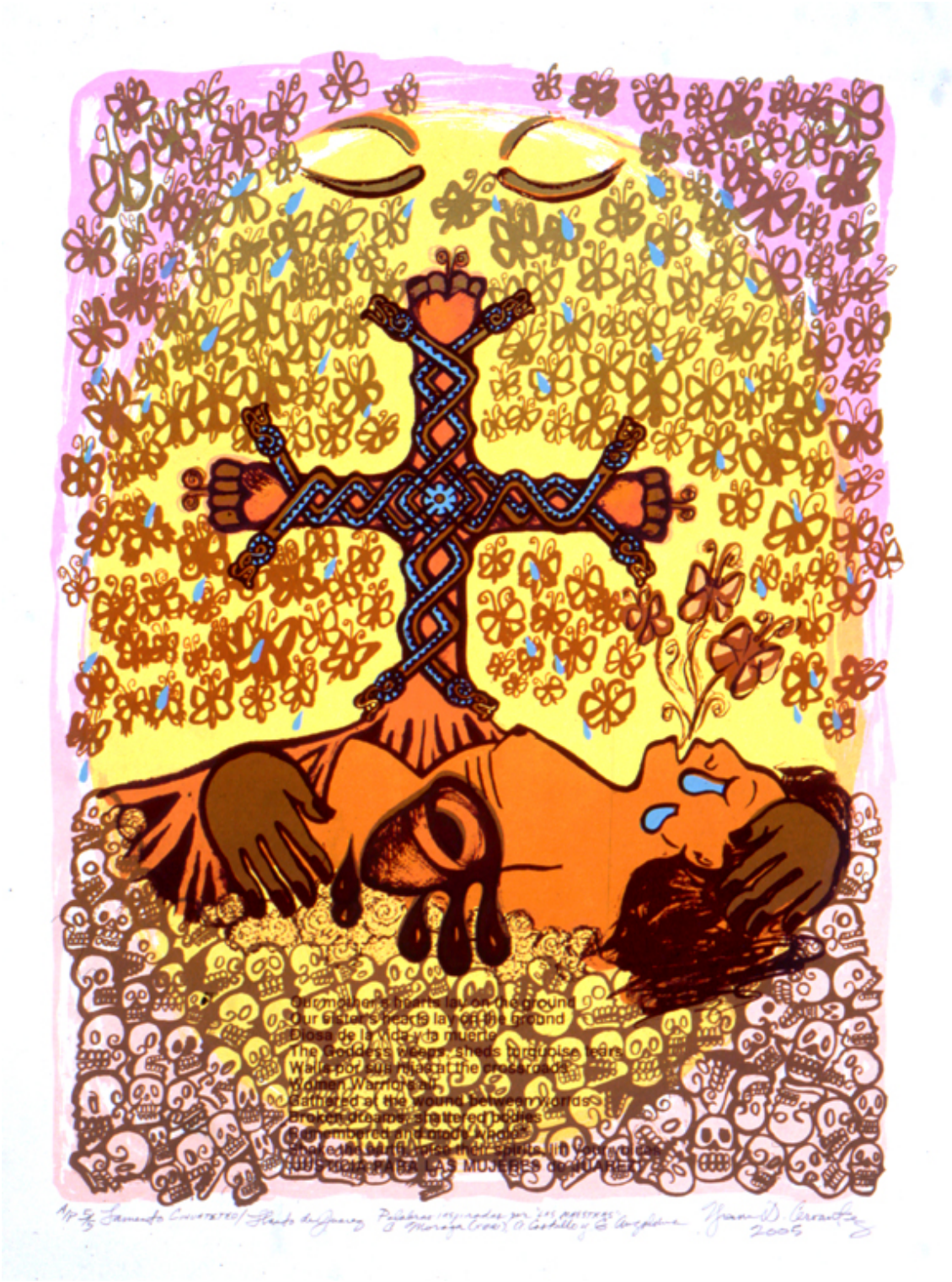

Figure 9. Cervantez, Yreina D. *Lamento Cihuateteo/Llanto de Juarez*, silkscreen print, 2005.

Our mother's hearts lay on the ground
Our sister's hearts lay on the ground
Diosa de la vida y la muerte
The Goddess weeps, sheds turquoise tears
Wails por sus hijas at the crossroads
Women Warriors all
Gathered at the wound between worlds
Broken dreams, shattered bodies
Remmebered and made whole [sic]
Shake the earth, raise their spirits, lift your voices
JUSTICIA PARA LAS MUJERES de JUAREZ!

Cervantez conveys more than transnational political solidarity with women in Juarez. She claims them as members of "our" family—they are our mother's and sister's whose "hearts lay on the ground." She uses the possessive pronoun "our" to indicate that these women belong to or are associated with her as the speaker/artist and with us as the readers. Her use of English and Spanish demonstrates the author's desire for North America (U.S. and Mexico) to also claim these women as indispensable members of these two bordering nations.

The hundreds of murder victims are likened to spiritual *Cihuateteo*. According to Aztec mythology Cihuateteo are spirits of women who died in pregnancy or childbirth and are "regarded with the same value that was given to the warriors who died on the battlefield" (Tovar-Rodríguez 2013, 555).[52] Cihuateteo are also connected to the myth of La Llorona. Cervantez alludes to the popular legend, without uttering her name, in order to proffer a complex history that is connected to present-day Cd. Juarez. For some, La Llorona incites feelings of cultural loss, sorrow and a longing for justice. Like La Llorona and Cihuateteo, the wounded spirits of the warrior women in Cd. Juarez cannot rest

[52] *University of Oregon Nahuatl Dictionary* accessed January 2, 2014, http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/.

because their physical forms ended tragically, so they roam the crossroads between life and death.

Cervantez uses *Lamento/Llanto* in the title to juxtapose internal sensation with the outward expression of emotions. In English *lamento* means to mourn an absence. *Llanto* is to physically weep or wail. The spirits of Juarez wail and mourn an absence as do the aggrieved who are left behind. The text and image communicate emotional shifts from death and sorrow to healing and empowerment through acts of remembering and speaking out against injustices. Speech is visually represented by the butterflies that fly from the woman's mouth and in the lines, "Shake the earth, raise their spirits, lift your voices/JUSTICIA PARA LAS MUJERES de JUAREZ!" The poem begins with subtle encouragement towards action by listing the website and ends with an exclamatory call to action: "Shake the earth, raise their spirits, lift your voices/JUSTICIA PARA LAS MUJERES de JUAREZ!" "Lamento Cihuateteo/Llanto de Juarez" facilitates a connection with a vulnerable population who reside on the margins of society in both life and in death. Situated before the table of contents and the narrative introduction, "Lamento Cihuateteo/Llanto de Juarez" sets an earnest and impassioned tone for the remainder of the text.

***Maya Chinchilla's "Mi Quierido 24th and Mission"***

"Mi Quierido 24th and Mission" is a poem written by Guatemalan writer, performer, video artist and educator Maya Chinchilla.[53] The poem reflects on issues of rape, gender norms and repression of women's sexuality as they manifest in her hometown of San Francisco. The author then connects her personal experiences to

[53] Chinchilla, Maya, "About Maya," *Chinchilla Like Tortilla*, accessed January 2, 2014, http://mayachapina.com/about/.

women across the globe who also experience gendered violence. Chinchilla paints a picture of the Mission district in San Francisco, California where men prevent her from participating fully in the city that she loves dearly. They harass her with catcalls and for "Some reason I know to walk away," she announces, "hurried hips not swaying." Chinchilla has been socialized to act like a "mujer decente," although she never considered herself "especially decente." Her father condemns "you women" for dressing like "Nacas"—like the poor women in those bars who wear "a dark bra under a white shirt." Chinchilla questions the agency of "those women" and the freedom one might express by wearing "tight jeans and/A stretchy v-neck that shows every bump every/movement/Dripping ornaments dangle teasing/gold hoops lasso your eyes." Despite her apparent self-confidence, "She sighs uncomfortable in the skin she thought/she was comfortable in." Chinchilla refers here to those women, but also implicates herself with feeling insecure. In the first few stanzas Chinchilla focuses on her personal experiences in the city. She questions her own "privilege" when women like her face harassment and rape in the "first world." She announces, "That is why I am connected to my hermanas/on the border./I know what it is to fear to have a body of mujer/Be careful I hear they are killing women over/there."

Chinchilla shifts to a transnational consideration of the status of women, connecting her own experiences with women in other nations who also face rape and violence. To walk alone at night, to dress "provocatively," to be a poor brown working-woman means death for her "hermanas" at the US-Mexico border. The local and transnational travels outward to consider the condition of "women across the planet." Chinchilla makes connections between the US-Mexico border, describing it as "a ditch a

hole an open wound," to the Berlin wall, the great wall of China, borders built on apartheid ideologies, "Eerie walls of silence." Like Cervantez, Chinchilla too begins by painting a grim picture of violence against women, then shifts to a pronounced resistance:

> So we March, mourn,
> we don't forget,
> write letters, make speeches
> hold discussions
> Looking up from fear
> and hopelessness
> raising awareness
> daring to be powerful

Chinchilla vividly describes violence against women at the border, women "who step out of line,/out of the house," "maquila women" repeating the line "ni una mas," which is the slogan for the women of Cd. Juarez. The saying, not one more, is used in response to violence against women across the globe. Chinchilla asks, "Pero sabes Que?," But you know What?, as a rhetorical device to direct the reader to heed her response: "No Estan Solas. No Estan Solas. No Estan Solas!/WE ARE NOT ALONE." In "Mi Quierido 24th and Mission" Chinchilla connects the intimate daily occurrences of her beloved neighborhood with those of all women around the world who suffer at the hands of patriarchal global capitalism and advocates for a global feminist consciousness.

***Marisol Crisostomo-Romo's "We Are"***

Similarly, the poem "We Are" by Marisol Crisostomo-Romo, Chicana/Pascua Yaqui poet, dancer, actress and activist, provides a graphic illustration of colonial violence and its persistent effects on peoples of the Americas. The author names specific historical sites and events that haunt her memory:

> We were the ones flung into mass graves
> Bodies
> Upon bodies

Became ghosts
Upon ghosts
Roaming the Black Hills, Sand Creek, Acteal,
Plymouth Rock

The Black Hills are sacred lands in the Lakota Sioux territory of South Dakota extending into Wyoming. The Black Hills are a signpost for the Wounded Knee Massacre of the Lakota people on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota on December 29, 1890, which was the last formally recognized battle in the American Indian Wars.[54] Prior to Wounded Knee, gold and other natural resources were "discovered" in the Black Hills Expedition led by General George Armstrong Custer making the land desirable to white miners and settlers, leaving the land and its people subject to continual exploitation. Members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the same site almost one hundred years later in 1973 in an effort to bring attention to the Wounded Knee Massacre, to the ongoing struggles of Lakotas in the region, and to the plight of Native American peoples in the United States. Sand Creek, another atrocious consequence of the American Indian Wars, is the name for the massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho by the Colorado Territory Militia on November 29, 1864.[55]

Crisostomo-Romo lists Acteal as another site of colonial violence. Acteal is the Tzotzil Indian village in Chiapas, Mexico where paramilitaries massacred 45 people

[54] Rose, Christina, "Native History: Wounded Knee Descendant Remembers Family's Past," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, December 29, 2013, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/12/29/native-history-wounded-knee-descendent-remembers-familys-past-152839.

[55] "Sand Creek Massacre," *National Park Service*, last modified April 3, 2014, http://www.nps.gov/sand/index.htm; Berry, Carol, "Native History: Sand Creek Massacre Devastates Tribes, Intensifies War," *Indian Country Today Media Network*, November 29, 2013, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/29/native-history-sand-creek-massacre-devastates-tribes-intensifies-warfare-152414.

during a Roman Catholic prayer meeting on December 22, 1997.[56] The victims were members of the group *Las Abejas*, or the Bees Civil Society, who were known to support the demands of the EZLN, but advocated for social change through non-violence. The final site named is Plymouth Rock, which is thought of in the dominant imaginary of the United States as the site of the Mayflower landing and the Pilgrim's founding of Plymouth Colony in present day Massachusetts. It is an important national symbol of discovery and progress, whereas for Native peoples, Plymouth Rock is emblematic of invasion and settler colonialism.

Crisostomo-Romo makes connections across temporal geographies, between various sites of violence endured by Indigenous peoples. A commonality between these events is the majority of those murdered and mutilated were unarmed women, children and elders. Often the perpetrators were not charged for their crimes and in some instances they are thought of as "heroes of history." As Cervantez alludes to in "Lamento Cihuateteo," Crisostomo-Romo's poem illustrates the ancestral spirits are wounded and cannot rest because their physical forms ended tragically. Crisostomo-Romo grieves remembering how "Small children are forced to watch as/Don Cabeza de Puto/Forces his greed into her cornsilk center/Leaving her with a sadness that lasts for more than 500 years." The author laments colonial gendered violence and its residual effects on her.

The poem shifts between plural past tense "we were" to first person present tense. Crisostomo-Romo writes, "As I prepare snuff can lids for my prayer dress/I pray." This rhetorical shift is significant because it points to the ways that collective memories of

[56] Lacey, Marc, "10 Years Later, Chiapas Massacre Still Haunts Mexico," *New York Times*, December 23, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/23/world/americas/23acteal.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0; Stephen, Lynn "The First Anniversary of the Acteal Massacre in Chiapas." *Cultural Survival Quarterly,* 23.1 (Spring 1999).

violence come to bear on individuals in the present. The line refers to the jingle dress dance believed to have come from the Ojibwe sacred vision that foretold of a sacred dance that would heal a terminally ill young girl. The dance emerged during the 1920s when Native American religion was outlawed in the United States and was later introduced to the pan-Indian powwow community where it is now a popular genre. For Crisostomo-Romo, the sacred and deeply personal act of making her jingle dress becomes a communal undertaking through the act of remembering social histories and the collective "sadness that lasts for more than 500 years." This passage illustrates the power of structural violence and enduring intergenerational sadness. Ghosts roam the physical world, haunting the memories of their descendants. Unlike Cervantez and Chinchilla who vocalize a confrontational stance against gendered violence, Crisostomo-Romo prays to forget. She aches to forget "The nursing babies ripped from their mothers breasts and thrown in the air for/Target practice," lamenting, "We are those mothers and/My god,/We are those babies,/Nursing on memory." The author's use of the phrase "we are" in the conclusion and as the title further demonstrates how cultural memory functions in communities in the present and into the future.

***Maritza Alvarez's "¡Por la Dignidad! Vicam, Sonora"***

A visual image that confronts patriarchal global capitalism and gendered violence in the contemporary Americas is "¡Por la Dignidad! Vicam, Sonora" by Maritza Alvarez (see fig. 10). A mestiza in her late thirties, with a purposeful stare and closed mouth, stands tall behind a microphone in the black and white photograph. The subject is wearing a t-shirt and a lanyard around her neck that secures multiple badges, signaling that she is speaking at a formal conference or gathering. She is holding a machete in the

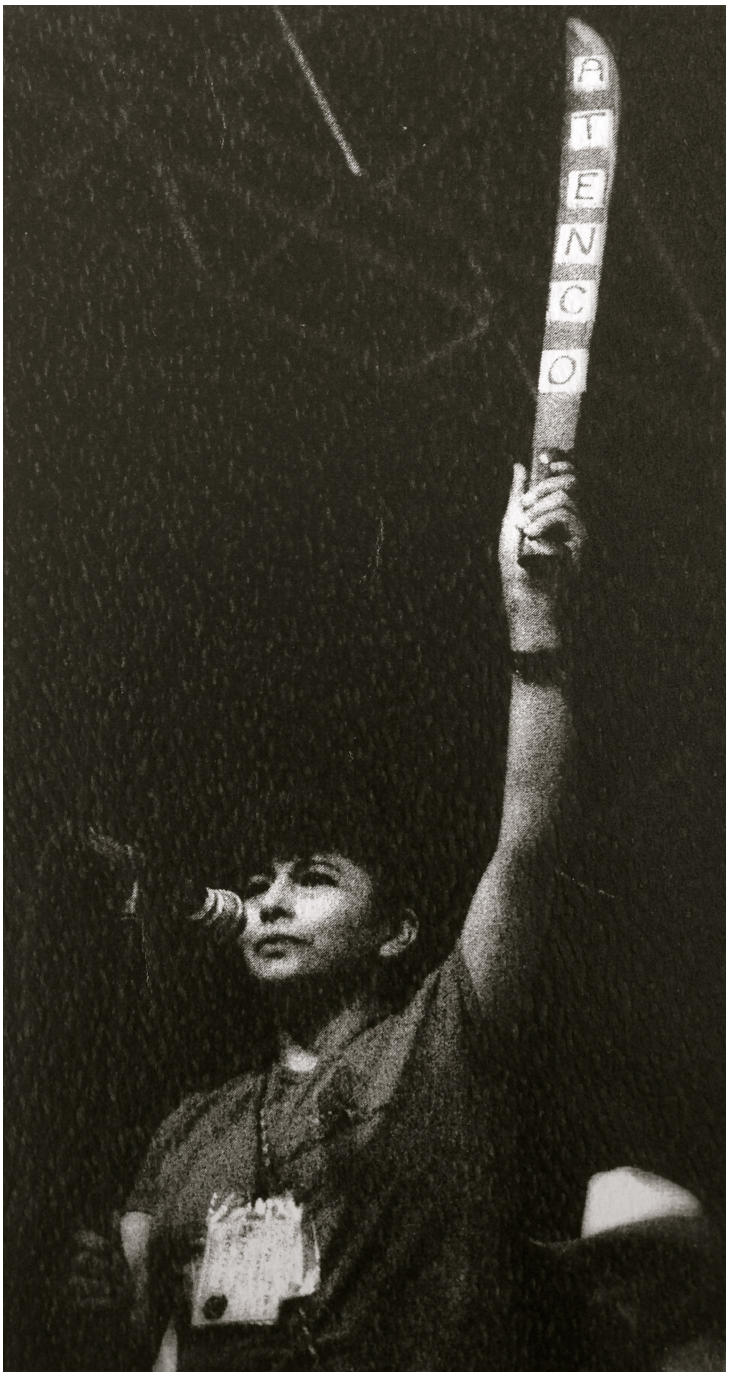


Figure 10. Alvarez, Maritza. *¡Por la Dignidad! Vicam, Sonora*, photograph, 2008.

air with the letters A-T-E-N-C-O running down the blade. According to Amnesty International, protesting peasant vendors led by the local organization People's Front in Defense of the Land (*Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra,* FPDT), were arrested in San Salvador Atenco, a small town just outside of Mexico City, in early May 2006.[57] The confrontations were very violent, resulting in the deaths of two protesters. More than forty-five women were arrested and state police sexually assaulted dozens. Amnesty International reports that while at the prison, "the women were initially denied appropriate medical examinations and the opportunity to report the abuses." Given the title "¡Por la Dignidad! Vicam, Sonora", it is likely that the photograph was taken at the Indigenous Encounter of the Americas in Vicam, Sonora in October 2007 where thousands of Indigenous nations, organizations and individuals convened to discuss the state of Indigenous peoples across the Americas.[58]

***Favianna Rodriguez's "We Resist US Imperialism"***

The poster "We Resist US Imperialism" by the Oakland-based Afro-Peruvian artivist Favianna Rodriguez is another confrontation of patriarchal global capitalism and gendered violence through visual imagery (see fig. 11). The mustard, white and burgundy offset print was the third piece in a series developed for INCITE, Women of Color

[57] "Mexico: Women of Atenco," *Amnesty International*, accessed January 7, 2014, http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/cases/mexico-women-of-atenco; "Continuing Struggle Against Violent Repression in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico," *Cleveland Indy Media Center*, accessed January 7, 2014, http://cleveland.indymedia.org/archives/archive_by_id.php?id=10260&category_id=1.

[58] "Urgent Solidarity Request for the Gathering of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas," *Colectivos de Apoyo, Solidaridad y Acción (CASA)*, Issue 51 (September 2007), http://www.casacollective.org/story/fundraising-requests/urgent-solidarity-request-gathering-indigenous-peoples-americas.


Figure 11. Rodriguez, Favianna, *We Resist Colonization*, offset print, 2003.

Against Violence (2003).[59] The artist explains that the image is based on a photograph of a young Palestinian girl taken by Mizue Aizeki, a social justice organizer and photographer based in New York.[60] The young woman featured in the image wears a *hijab*, a scarf worn by Muslim women. With a soft scowl, her gaze is fixed towards the viewer, perhaps displaying her discontent and disappointment in the Western viewer who idly stands by while the U.S. government wages war on the Muslim world. The bold capitalized text on the poster reads: "GENOCIDE & US DOMINATION ≠ LIBERATION" at the top and "WE RESIST COLONIZATION!" at the bottom. Due to the fact that the poster was created in 2003, the print implicitly espouses support for the Free Palestine Movement. Yet, there is no explicit declaration and so the image also expresses solidarity with the Muslim diaspora and other peoples across the planet who are affected by and resist U.S. imperialism, war and colonial violence. The other posters in the INCITE! series, "We Are Not the Enemy" (2001) and "Women of Color Against War" (2001), also convey an anti-war message and U.S. women of color's solidarity with Muslim women in the aftermath of 9-11. Rodriguez explains, "In contrast to national cries to 'Bring the Troops Home,' we were calling for an end to U.S. Imperialism and violence against third world women and children."[61] Rodriguez's poster and Alvarez's photograph personalize the effects of war, both sanctioned and low-intensity, and speak to the ways U.S. imperialism impacts Indigenous women across the planet.

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[59] INCITE! is "a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing." http://www.incite-national.org/.

[60] Rodriguez, Favianna, "Portfolio Contents," accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.favianna.com/port_posters/posters6.php.

[61] Ibid.

***Denise Villanueva's "Women of Color"***

Denise Villanueva explores a distinct form of intimate gendered violence in her short non-fiction epistolary essay "Women of Color." English and Spanish are used interchangeably in her analysis of the psychological and emotional harm Latinas cause one another. Villanueva challenges stereotypes based on physiognomy arguing that both *güeras* and brown skin Latinas face racism, which is often internalized, because they are not accepted into dominant white Euro-US society. Güeras, she claims, are "put down" and thought of as "sellouts" by "their own." She contests this intra-ethnic conflict asserting, "It is a sad thing when we can't get along or when we demonstrate our frustration against each other in violent actions and words." Villanueva expands the understanding of violence here to not only include physical injury and death that occur as a result of socio-political and economic structures of power, but she points to the mental and emotional harm women cause each other. She makes the connection that these forms of intimate violence are often a consequence of structural systems of oppression such as racism (read colorism) and heteropatriarchy. Villanueva questions, "Porque no podemos convivir juntas?" As women of color in a white misogynistic society she exclaims, "We are all we have in the end." The essay concludes with a question: "Instead of judging each other why don't we help each other and stick together-you know-ser unidas?" Her final query, presented in English and Spanish, is open ended, leaving the reader to consider the proposition of choosing to come together under the political label "women of color," emphasizing the importance of the title, which does not appear in the body of the text. The tone of the essay is mindful expressing a desire for change on an intimate level.

***Reading Love***
***Margaret "Quica" Alarcón's "Ilantin"***

There are multiple and varied illustrations of love for women including love of self and diverse expressions of healthy loving relationships with men and with other women. "Ilantin" is the title of the short trilingual (Nahuatl, Spanish and English) poem paired with a pencil drawing by Quica, also known as Margaret Alarcón, core MdM member and lead zine editor (see fig. 12). Quica writes to her *abuelita* who she identifies as an "Ilantin," Nahuatl for a wise person or philosopher, and as a "Tlamatini." In post-Classic central Mexico the Tlamatini were responsible for four religious and artistic functions: the priest who performed prophesies who was also an astronomer, teacher, physician and healer; the soothsayer who was the mediator between the people and the spirit world; the sorcerer who served as counselor or guardian of the community; and finally the caretaker of the sacred books (2012, 23-24). Quica's use of the designations Ilantin and Tlamatini demonstrates the import she places on her abuelita as a sacred source of knowledge and as the connection to an Indigenous mestiza consciousness and spirituality, which can be further understood through an examination of the accompanying image.

The mixed media drawing on canson paper with burnt edges features the body of a dismembered woman. Her face, neck and chest appear in the bottom left corner; her naked torso, right upper arm and thighs are the central image; while her hands, gripping her ankles and feet, come into view in the upper right corner of the drawing. Suggesting to me that the dismembered body is a contemporary representation of *Coyolxauhqui*, the Mexica goddess of the moon, Quica writes:


Figure 12. Quica, *Ilantin*, mixed media on canson paper, 2006.

Ilantin, Tlamatini
Take my ears
Tu cuerpo de lagrimas
Con rios de caminos
Di porque
Before you turn to stone

Quica makes a flesh offering to s Coyolxauhqui before she turns to stone. A popular figure among Chicanas, Coyolxauhqui has been reimagined and reconstructed by artists and writers after the Coyolxauhqui stone was rediscovered at the Templo Mayor in Mexico City in 1978 (Anzaldúa 1999, 2009; Blake 2008).

Quica uses other Mesoamerican iconography in her drawing that further reveals her relationship to her abuelita. Small brightly colored day sign glyphs from the pre-conquest Toltec *tonalpohualli*, or day calendar, are scattered throughout the abuelita's torso. *Ollin* appears on the grandmother's throat. I interpret this day sign, drawing on Victor Sanchez's interpretation in *The Toltec Oracle* (2004), to exemplify "movement," a universal characteristic of all life. Ollin signals transformation and change, which are the only constants in life, where one may come to know what they are becoming. I interpret this day to represent a time of growth and personal development and the need to adapt in a changing world, and so the placement of the ollin glyph on the throat implies that the abuelita's voice, her stories and songs, are sanctified as they become audible. It alerts the viewer that what is said plays a significant role throughout one's life.

*Tecpatl*, flint or stone knife, is seen on the abuelita's right breast. This day sign calls for one to "Sculpt for yourself a real face and develop your soul, so that you can see others and be seen by them" (Sanchez 2004, 194). Tecpatl represents self-sacrifice and the purposeful efforts necessary to achieve a higher awareness. Like the flint, one must shape and polish oneself within before acquiring an ability to create something outside of oneself. Tecpatl is also "a day of grave ordeals" and "a good day to test one's character."[62] The placement of this glyph suggests that the grandmother may have faced breast cancer and possibly a mastectomy. It also implies that adversity was part of a process of physical self-sacrifice that led to a higher spiritual consciousness. On the right side of her lower abdomen, near the fallopian tube and ovary, is *quiahuitl,* the day sign for rain, also known as water from above. In the Toltec worldview rain is a sacred

[62] Voorburg, René, *Aztec Calendar*, accessed March 1, 2014, http://www.azteccalendar.com/.

element that sustains life and calls one to patiently nurture and fertilize seeds that will bear prosperous fruit. This glyph indicates that the grandmother bore and raised a child or children, both physically and socially, and was a dedicated caregiver. Bright green leaves sprout from *xochitl*, the central image, which rests prominently over the vagina. The symbol of spiritual revelations and the flowering of heightened awareness, flowers also signify birth, life cycles, and momentary happiness. Xochitl reminds one to live fully in the moment because like the flower, life is beautiful but also impermanent. The location of the glyph on the abuelita's visibly aged body invites the viewer to consider the beauty and power of woman's fleeting ability to create life. *Cipactli*, crocodile or dragon, and *ozomatli*, monkey, are imprinted on the abuelita's left thigh. Cipactli "depicts energy and work, rewards and recognition," while "ozomatli is a day for creating, for play, for celebrating."[63] Cipactli reflects an individual's energy, expressed as character virtues and flaws. Monkey also denotes curiosity and ensuing wisdom. The pairing of these symbols suggests the importance of finding a balance between work and play and learning and teaching, and that rewards come from engaging in both. The six glyphs encourage the viewer to consider the myriad ways women's bodies are marked by experience. Taken together, the poem and drawing are a contemporary codex that depicts the importance of women as bearers of knowledge, likening grandmothers to healers, philosophers and female deities who have the power to survive adversity and transmit cultural memory.

***Vickie Vertiz's "Momma of the Soft Jersey T's"***

The theme of intergenerational love between women is prevalent in Vickie Vertiz's poetic valentine to her mother affectionately titled "Momma of the Soft Jersey T's." The bilingual English and Spanish poem recounts sensory memories in a

[63] Ibid.

heartwarming and humorous tone. Vertiz writes, Momma "Dons a heroic pointy brassiere and a girdle you can see through." This visual memory speaks to Chinchilla's concern about whether or not the women in her neighborhood actually express agency when they wear dark colored bras under see through tops. Vertiz echoes this concern by pointing out her mother's bravery for adorning her body in the way she pleases, subtly acknowledging that this is a dangerous undertaking, whether in the face of physical violence, catcalls or judgment.

Vertiz's memories are also linked to food and drink. She recalls, momma "birthed countless cocidos, caldos, camarones endiablados" and she "developed sophistication for Corralejos and Cazadores." She writes of specific smells reminiscing, "Her hands smell like chile and ajo." Memories are transmitted through food traditions and certain meals are named to acknowledge her mother's culinary repertoire. The mix of past and present tense indicates that Vertiz's sensory memories of her momma run into the present. She remembers being "home/asleep from long nights of/Loving the wrong girl (again) and dancing to cumbias at the gay club" and how she "studied how to fine tune love by watching mom dance norteñas with their Poppa." Vertiz's identity as queer daughter is a part of, but not central to the story as it is in "My Hands" by Isela Laca and "Mother" by Claudia Rodriguez, discussed below.

***Claudia Mercado's "Aliento Alimento"***

The themes of intergenerational love and food customs are evident in the bilingual English and Spanish poem "Aliento Alimento." Filmmaker and founding MdM member Claudia Mercado recalls memories of her grandfather in this four-stanza poem. In English the word *aliento* signifies breath, but it can also mean courage. *Alimento*

translates as food or nourishment and when used figuratively, it means encouragement. The pairing of the terms, each with multiple meanings, suggests the author's complex understanding of the importance of food customs. Each verse begins with "Un tamal Oaxaqueño." According to folklorist Rafaela Castro, tamales are culturally and socially significant because they are an ancient Indigenous food, laboriously produced in a family setting, typically only for special occasions (2001, 218). Mercado remembers her grandfather and the stories passed down to her through sharing traditional Mexican dishes.

> Un tamal Oaxaqueño
> He craved over dinner
> Our organic meeting site
> A delicious classroom
> Where his-story became mine
> And the chile de arbol, frijoles de oya, arroz,
> Salsa, queso adobera y tortillas
> Our school supplies
> Serving as portals to visit our ancestors
> Investigando Mexican-Indian leyendas, mitos
> And
> Healings of truth

Mercado's memories are connected to food customs and the accompanying stories, emotions and sensations, which provide sustenance and nourishment both physically and spiritually. Food provided a way for Mercado to bond with her grandfather and to learn "his-story"—her grandfather's personal story, her family's story and a larger cultural history. The above excerpt illustrates how collective memory is transmitted through oral traditions and through material culture. The ingredients were Mercado's "school supplies" and her grandfather was her teacher who provided lessons about her Indigenous ancestors and other teachings she would not likely be exposed to in a formal educational system. Un tamal Oaxaqueño now carries his memories and is eaten in his honor.

***Monica Palacios' "Melt"***

The poem "Melt" by Chicana lesbian author, comedienne and activist Monica Palacios resembles the *corrdio* form in content, structure and purpose. Corridos are a popular narrative song and poetry form that are demarcated by their political undertones, by a narrator who tells a story from a Mexican or Mexican-American point of view, and often report on an alternative version of an event. Palacios narrates the story of a potential romance, in a structure suitable for oral transmission. She playfully chants:

> taste *chile*
> taste *carne*
> taste this
> taste that
> taste *chile*
> taste *carne*
> taste this
> taste that
> taste me
> taste me
> taste me!

The author relies on food metaphors to express romantic love and desire between women. Using vivid imagery, Palacios articulates carnal desire through sensuous food metaphors, wielding culturally significant objects such as tamales and chile to express physical pleasure for sex and to entice her would-be lover. Without using gendered pronouns she writes: "Unwrap me like a tamale, baby/undo my steaming *hojas*/one by one." Palacios describes the corporeal acts of eating, tasting, touching and biting, likening her flesh to *masa,* or corn dough, the staple ingredient used to make tamales. "Sink your teeth into/my magnificent *masa*/let me melt in your mouth." The poem represents a marginalized experience within dominant society in general and within border narratives specifically: Chicana lesbian desire. Chicano cultural critic William Calvo-Quiroz argues

that corridos are "archives of knowledge about personal survival and storytelling along the border."[64] Palacios contributes to an archive of knowledge through performance poetry that subverts notions of tradition, love and heteronormative desire.

***Liza Marie Cohen's "The Woman Inside Me Wander"***

Romantic love and desire between women is a central theme in the poems "The Woman Inside Me Wander" by Liza Marie Cohen, "My Hands" by Isela Laca and "Mother" by Claudia Rodriguez. Like Palacios, Cohen does not use gendered pronouns, however the title and content imply that her lover in the story is a woman:

> The women inside me wander
> Grasping sweet sounds in the night
> Trying to silence the short breaths
> Careful not to wake the sleeping bodies beneath us
> Wondering why the night ignites people's passions
> How hands that have merely waved hello and goodbye
> Wander aggressively in the dark
> Searching for soft, warm spots
> That melt the Oventic air

Cohen deploys imagery of night and darkness throughout the poem, which are symbols associated with the moon and the feminine unknown. She uses silence as a trope to suggest that the actions between the lovers are forbidden and susceptible to danger if brought out of the shadows. Cohen later describes the two subjects as having a "soft silhouette," further implying that the lovers are women. They are in Oventic, which is a Zapatista community village in Chiapas, and conceivably are human rights observers at the international peace camp. The lovers may be activists working in solidarity with transnational Indigenous communities, whose sexual exploration is a part of an evolving feminist consciousness. Cohen marks the conclusion of the nighttime rendezvous with the rising sun: "Day breaks and silence lingers in our beds." The shift from night to day

[64] Calvo-Quiroz, William, personal communication, January 20, 2014.

indicates that the lovers are out in the open and might have a chance at a new beginning, but the light mutes them. Despite the radiating silence, Cohen cannot help but recall sensual memories of night. She writes:

> Flashbacks of your wet fingers
> Laying in between the cracks in my hands
> And your lips
> Warm and soft
> Pressed against my neck
> Truth lies like night
> On each players soft silhouette

She recalls tenderly exploring each other's form. But her memories, like her body, cannot hide from the light of day. The lovers are marked by a secret that cloaks them in darkness. Cohen concludes with a declaration: "The only solace in the heat of confusion/Was the knowledge that I grow stronger/With every lesson I live." The poem is a vivid recollection of perhaps a first-time intimate encounter between women. Cohen presents a thoughtful personal account from the perspective of a maturing woman who understands that despite feeling silenced, she has the autonomy to cultivate knowledge through future lived experiences.

***Isela Laca's "My Hands"***

In Isela Laca's "My Hands" and Claudia Rodriguez's "Mother" the author's identity as a daughter is linked with sexuality, desire and knowledge of self. Laca's poem is a sensual story of self-discovery, revealing the power of touch to comfort and heal, to create life and art, to hurt and to communicate. She writes:

> The touch of your hands
> A smile not only on your face
> But on your body
> Intuitiveness and willingness to make me
> feel better
> Your fingers warm with loving care

Caresses my hair, my forehead, my hands
And that look of love in your eyes
Not only comforts but heals
Your hands welcomed me as I made my
grand presence

Love between women is made evident through the use of gendered pronouns later in the poem, however in the opening stanza Laca blurs the line between romantic and altruistic love. Is the woman to whom she refers her mother? Her lover? Does the "grand presence" refer to her birth or to her coming out story? The ambiguity implies that the woman in the narrative can in fact be either. The crux of the excerpt above points to women's capacity to comfort and heal each other in myriad ways.

Laca makes other subtle references to coming out and to her first sexual experience with a woman in the following passage:

[I] Pounded to fix thing
To have doors open
That at times remained
Silently
Shut
As I journeyed
For health, safety and happiness
An awesome, benevolent and powerful
Light
Touched my hands
Unspeakable is this sensation
I experienced
Light, emitting, tingling…

Like Cohen, Laca uses imagery of silence and light to describe her encounter, but in distinct ways. Laca reveals that she attempted to break down doors that confined her to silence, recalling the metaphor and lived experience of the closet. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the difficulty of the closet, arguing that heterosexism enables new closets to continuously "spring up," creating a revolving door effect between

being “in” and “out.” While queer folks are not the only people who experience the closet, Kosofsky Sedgwick argues it is a prevalent feature of social life. The closet, she argues, is tied to problematic binary discourses such as secrecy/disclosure, private/public, same/different, homo/ heterosexual, and is “the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (1993, 48). For Laca, the closet was encountered on her journey towards “health, safety and happiness.” While on this journey, she was touched by a beautiful light that produced unspeakable feelings. Her life changed in that moment, and yet she was silenced, closeted once more. “I thought of my family, relatives and friends/Few accepted this way/Mistrustful were most.” Laca is critical of the contempt that women in love face, whether a daughter and her mother or two lovers. She questions, “How can anyone doubt/Someone willing to place their hands/ With love and humbleness on others/So that Universal Life Force Energy/May heal the physical, emotional, mental/and spiritual wounds.” The light Laca describes is this Universal Life Force Energy represented by a woman’s hands—a feminine, spiritual, creative force with an ability to heal humanity’s wounds.

***Sarah Espinoza’s “Our Lady of Loteria”***

Located opposite page to “My Hands,” is “Our Lady of Loteria,” an acrylic painting by Sarah Espinoza (see fig. 13). Loteria is a card game similar to bingo, which originated in Italy in the 15th century and was brought to New Spain in 1769. The game was originally played by the elite classes but later became popular at Mexican fairs. The current lotería images display a kitsch aesthetic and have become iconic in Mexican and Mexican American culture. The 54 cards used in the game depict a person, object or animal. The cards seen in “Our Lady of Loteria” include: *la luna, el diablo, el*

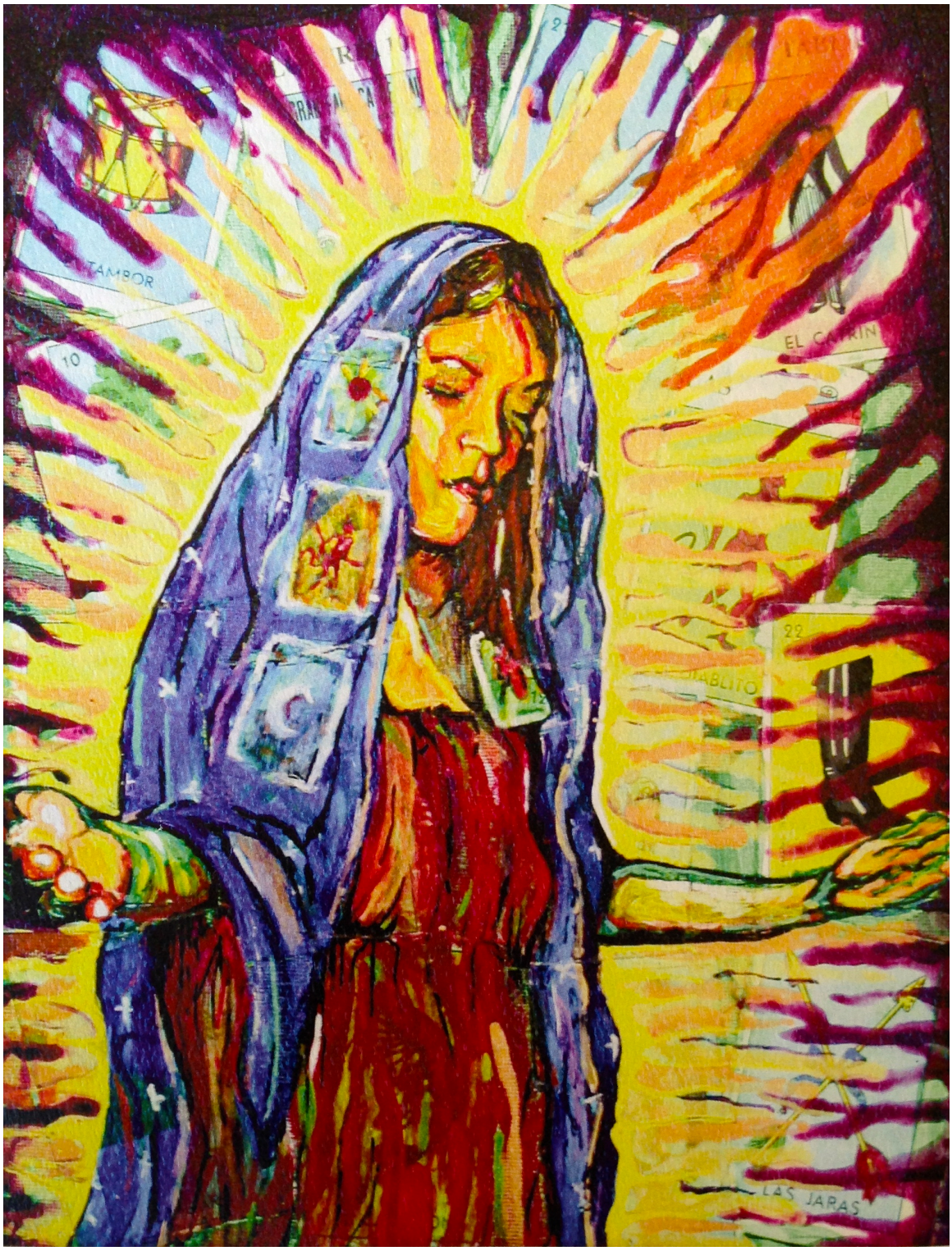


Figure 13. Espinoza, Sarah. *Our Lady of Loteria*, acrylic, 2006.

*sol, el corazón, el árbol, el tambor, la mano, el catrín, la bota, el nopal and las jaras.* Espinoza's image depicts a young brown-skinned stylized Virgen wearing a long dark red dress with flecks of lime green. A *manto*, or veil, of blue and purple hues covers her head and shoulders and flows to the ground. Her elbows rest on her waist with her forearms extended, palms up, fingers closed in a prayer position. Our Lady's eyes are closed and brilliant rays of light and lotería cards emanate from her being. The placement of the image, adjacent to Laca's poem, further suggests a connection between love, the sacred, women's sexuality, and healing. Palacios, Cohen and Laca all implicitly suggest their love for women to different degrees. Sometimes the content is overtly sexual, it is often altruistic, and it is always sensual, but none of these authors openly claim a queer identity in their poetry. The only unequivocal lesbian story in *13 Baktun* is "Mother."

***Claudia Rodriguez's "Mother"***

Speaking from the perspective of a queer daughter, Claudia Rodriguez addresses her mother, articulating the love she feels for her and for her lover by juxtaposing experiences with each woman:

> I was born between your legs
> but it is between hers that I feel alive.
> It is in your bed I first felt love and comfort
> but it is in hers that I learned to make love.
> It is your face I see myself in
> but it is in seeing hers that makes me melt.
> It is your food that satisfied my hunger
> but it is her body and passion that satisfy my soul.

By mirroring these experiences, Rodriguez is at once able to affirm the enduring love, care and warmth that her mother has provided, and connect those moments to her own ability to cultivate a healthy and loving sexual relationship with a woman. Rodriguez asks her mother to also make the connections between these relationships. She continues:

You see mother
she is not taking me away from you
she is taking care of me.
She has taken everything you have given me
and made it fit ME.
Mother you will never be replaced
because it is you who has given me life
but it is with a woman that I have experienced
my rebirth…

Working within the dominant discourse of the male partner assuming responsibility of the daughter from the father, Rodriguez makes her relationship intelligible to her mother. However, it is a woman who inherits the role of emotional provider from the mother. By demonstrating that a woman lover is a natural extension of the mother/daughter relationship, Rodriguez disrupts heteropatriarchy and rigid conceptions of the family. Thus, the mother role is not only bestowed through the physical act of giving birth—it is conceived of in broader terms to include women who love and nurture, not just children, but their lovers as well. Mother is life giver and she can facilitate multiple rebirths in a lifetime.

**On Violence and Love: *13 Baktun* as Cultural Intervention**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[65] The Mujeres de Maiz anniversary issue zine *Flor y Canto: 13 Baktun Return of the Wisdom of Elders* presents illustrations of interpersonal and collective/structural forms of violence, both symbolic and material. The nature of the violent acts are physical, sexual and

[65] World Health Organization, "Health Topics: Violence," http://www.who.int/topics/violence/en/ (accessed 12 December 2014).

psychological. The authors and artists demonstrate both explicit and covert agency in the face of this violence, including direct confrontation and survival. Yet telling these dire stories are expressions of love. By calling attention to acts of violence and by recognizing those affected, the zine provides an outlet to heal personal and collective wounds in order to imagine and create a different future. The juxtaposition of love stories with violence, demonstrates alternative possibilities for the treatment of women and other marginalized groups. Embedded in these entries are expressions of ancestral memory and an indigeneity that is transnational, planetary and women-centered. Collectively these stories make up an archive for self-preservation.

As a feminist of color anthology, *13 Baktun* works beyond socially constructed binary oppositions of theory/activism, academia/community, professional/non-professional writing, public/private and oral/written expression to forge new models for feminist communities where the self is constructed in relation to others (Franklin 1997; Arteaga 1997). Boundaries are blurred as women share intimate details of their private lives in public media forms. In *Writing Women's Communities: The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Multi-Genre Anthologies*, literary and cultural critic Cynthia G. Franklin observes, "The criterion for admission to these anthologies is not literary excellence or influence, as in canonical anthologies, but the contributor's elaboration of the identity the anthology is constructing" (1997, 9). The print community that materializes through reading a particular anthology such as *13 Baktun* can potentially incite cultural shifts, altering writers' and readers' values, consciousness and lived practices.

Violence/Love in *13 Baktun* represents a dualism characteristic of many Indigenous worldviews. Dualism is understood as contrasting aspects or energies that are interdependent essential parts of a harmonious whole. In Indigenous Andean thought this concept is called *Yanantin*. According to Anthropologist Hillary Webb, "existence is believed to be dependent upon the tension and balanced interchange between polarities. [T]here is a very definite ideological *and* practical commitment within indigenous Andean life to bringing the seemingly conflicting opposites into harmony with one another without destroying or altering either one" (2012, 2). In Toltec and other Mesoamerican worldviews, this concept is manifested as *Ometeotl*, the Lord of Duality, who represents the sacred union of opposite realms called the *tonal* (light) and the *nagual* (dark).

The black and white photograph "As We Lay" by Janet Dandridge provides a visual representation of this dualism and the zine's cultural intervention as a "de-colonizing performatic" (see fig. 14). The photograph depicts a naked woman lying on her side in a fetal position. The words "acceptance, respect, care, duality, life force, love and communication" are written on her body in bold black letters. The words "disrespect, disregard, coercion, abuse, manipulation, taken for granted, misogyny, neglect and hate," written in bold white lettering, are scattered on the black floor in front of her. The black background indicates that the woman is not anywhere in particular, but the words representing the damaging meanings, feelings and actions are ever-present and palpable. The woman's limbs wrap around her body in order to thwart the destruction and violence that surround her. Her naked body displays a vulnerability to the words but also her strength as a woman. Perhaps she is a fetus in the womb, surrounded and protected by the

love of her mother. Yet the violence outside awaits her before she is even born. The juxtaposition of white and black, light and dark further illustrates a dualism and a desire to find harmony in order to heal historical spiritual imbalances and disrupt the colonial practices of mapping and creating divisions across generations and geographies, lands and bodies.


Figure 14. Dandridge, Janet. *As We Lay*, photograph, nd.

## Chapter V

## Radical Indigenous Mestizaje and Mujeres de Maiz Fashion[66]

In this chapter I closely examine the fashion lines of two Mujeres de Maiz designers, Felicia Montes and Lisa Rocha, and the 2010 urban Indigenous mestiz@ fashion show "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion" as manifestations of "radical indigenous mestizaje." My analysis of the FE Clothing Line is based on close readings of individual pieces in the line and from working closely with Felicia and Chela Sandoval to produce an article about Indigenous fashion shows for an anthology. Felicia and I wrote collaboratively, exchanged numerous emails and had extensive conversations about her FE fashion line. This section could not have been written without these exchanges that occurred between December 2011 and December 2014. For the purposes of this chapter, while I adapt her emails and oral narratives into the text, I attempt to incorporate direct quotes as much as possible in order for her voice to come through alongside mine. My analysis of Lisa's jewelry is based on close readings of individual pieces in her "Día de los Muertos collection" and from interviews conducted in personal and via email. At the end of the chapter, I return to an enactment of participant observation ethnography in my analysis of the fashion show. I provide an "Organizing Manual" as an instructional case study for generating a community-based fashion show or art event as my final contribution to this mode of activist scholarship. Before reading MdM fashion, I turn to theoretical frameworks in cultural anthropology, folklore and

[66] I would like to thank Chela Sandoval and Felicia Montes, who have been instrumental in shaping my understandings of contemporary Indigenous fashion. This chapter is a result of working closely and collaboratively with Sandoval discussing, researching, reading, writing, editing and revising. Felicia and I have had many conversations about Indigenous women's fashion and her FE clothing line, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. I am also grateful to Aída Hurtado, Norma Cantú and Michelle P. Baca for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

performance studies as a means to understand contemporary Indigenous mestiz@ identity formation and the role of aesthetic performance in transmitting social memory and in expressing "radical indigenous mestizaje."

**Performing Cultural Identities and Social Memory**

According to performance studies scholar, theater director and playwright Henry Bial, aesthetic performance is a tangible temporally and spatially framed event, distinguishable from everyday mundane social life, where a group displays their cultural values, beliefs and identities for themselves and others through self-conscious rehearsed actions (2004, 59; see also Turner and McArthur 2008, 83). Below I define aesthetic performance, what it *is*, what it *does* as an aesthetic process, and its links to cultural memory. According to African performance critic Frances Harding, the interaction between performer and audience in an aesthetic performance is a temporary "suspension of the ordinary rather than a suspension of *reality* and thus constitutes more a heightening of reality in which it is recognized that ordinary people can become extra-ordinary for a period of time" (2003, 23). In his studies of ritual initiation rites, British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner uses the term "liminality" to describe this momentary interruption of quotidian existence (1982).

Numerous folklorists and performance studies scholars have pointed to the communicative and interactive nature of aesthetic performance (Bauman and Abrahams 1981; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988; Nájera Ramírez 1997; Schechner 2002; Stoeltje 1983). Richard Bauman argues that performance events are aesthetic modes of communication displayed for an audience and are open to evaluation and interpretation (1986, 3). Beverly J. Stoeltje distinguishes between aesthetic performances, festivals

specifically, held in community contexts that express customs meaningful to that community, and spectacles for outside consumption, such as festival tourism. Community festivals, as Stoeltje calls them, engage "multiple communications of celebration" and "can incorporate every art and play form in the culture, combining them in infinite variations, manipulating both form and content, and transcending routine perceptions through intense participation in artistic and ludic expression" (1983, 239). In *La Fiesta De Los Tastoanes: Critical Encounters in Mexican Festival Performance*, cultural anthropologist Olga Nájera-Ramírez comments on the significance of studying festivals, a term she uses interchangeably with "cultural performances":

> Since cultural performances involve intense participation in the display, reflection, and interpretation of 'the central meanings and values of a group,' cultural performances also constitute important sites for analyzing the cultural process. That is, festivals may be approached as important sites in which the ideas and values of the group are not merely displayed but, more importantly, transmitted, produced, and reproduced. (1997, 6)

If produced for decolonizing purposes these types of communal performances can become what Chela Sandoval, Arturo J. Aldama and Peter J. García call "de-colonizing performatics/the antics of the oppressed," that is, pranking escapades or acts drawn from hybrid and contradictory locations. These self-consciously organized performance "acts" intervene in coloniality and imperialism on behalf of egalitarianism, individual and collective liberation, creating de-colonizing effects (2012, 5). Decolonizing performatics-antics refer to "the techniques, tools and practical knowledges necessary for making and transforming psychic and material cultures." The term also playfully "signifies the one or more *antics* necessary for making transformation occur" (6).

Through aesthetic performance, communities negotiate their social positions, physical place, group identity, and come together to create a space of collective

belonging. Victor Turner used the term "communitas" to refer to the strong feelings of belonging and attachment experienced by participants during rituals and festivals (1982, 205-06). Folklorist and performance studies scholar Richard R. Flores has asserted that community festivals are "linked to cultural citizenship: those enactments and practices that forge a sense of community and belonging, lead to renewed experiences of identity, and provide a social space for the formation of collective practice and its concomitant forms of power" (1997, 125). Similarly, Beverly J. Stoeltje argues that community festivals can reinforce a group's collective identity and empower them to act on their own behalf (cited in Bauman 1992, 261-72). In sum, aesthetic performances are complex, multifaceted, multicoded, often participatory in nature (sometimes blurring the line between audience and performer), and are occasions where cultural identities and values are negotiated, constructed and expressed on the individual and communal level.

I now turn to the ways in which social memory is transmitted through performance, in other words, what performance *does*. Performance studies scholar and Latin Americanist Diana Taylor describes performance in its widest sense—movement, gesture, dancing, singing, music, orality—as expressive behavior that transmits cultural memory and collective knowledge (2003, 20). Indeed, memory is crucial here. Taylor suggests that performance functions as a form of knowing, an epistemology, that extends beyond the moment of enactment, arguing, "Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, through a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next" (2003, 21). Theologian Jeanette Rodríguez and cultural anthropologist Ted Fortier argue that these processes allow groups to *reconstruct* their cultural identity with the memories,

beliefs, and practices of previous generations (2007, 1). They assert that cultural memory transmits both deliberate and unconscious meanings and values and that the power of transmitting cultural memory lies in one becoming aware of those meanings and values.[67] As Rodríguez and Fortier underscore, "Memory becomes important as a survival mechanism when it becomes part of artistic, emotionally laden ways of forming group identity and meanings" (2007, 12). Acts of memory—remembering, recollection, interpretation, and transmission—provide marginalized groups a sense of continuity, of connection, and meaning in the face of cultural dominance, while aesthetic community-making practices resist social fragmentation and displacement (Flores 1997, 151; Kunow and Raussert 2008, 10). Aesthetic practices can facilitate a way to recover collective memories out of the condition of amnesia and provide a way to recover being.

Memory, then, is continually negotiated and (re)constructed in the present through performance, both aesthetic forms and everyday acts. While performance draws from a historical inventory, it cannot *be* the past, nor does it recreate the past, for performance is always constituted in the current socio-historical and political context and remade though each new enactment (Taylor 2003, 58). While traces of knowledge and identity remain, the social actors and the embodiment change constantly. The transmission of cultural memory is a subjective and dynamic process where "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission" (Taylor 2003, 20). Memory is marked by the complex "processes of splitting, dividing, and

[67] "Retribalizing mestizaje" is Anzaldúa's concept for the deliberate acts of choosing which cultural memories and practices to transmit. In "now let us shift…the path of conocimiento" Anzaldúa explains, "You pick and choose views, cultures with transformational potential—a partially conscious selection, not a mestizaje imposed on you, but one whose processes you can control. (You distinguish this mestizaje from acts of hybridization such as genetically engineering and modifying live organisms without their consent or consideration of their existence as integrated beings, or from acts resulting in cyborgian animal/machine hybrids). A retribalizing mestizaje becomes your coping mechanism, your strategy of resistance to both acculturating and inculturating pressures" (Anzaldúa 2002, 560-61).

doubling, speaking across the fissures and openings created by the flows of time and the orders of space" (Kunow and Raussert 2008, 11). In addition to recalling the past, aesthetic performance provides a site to creatively envision the future—it is where history and memory, real and imagined narratives, and multiple temporalities converge. I consider the questions posed by German American Studies scholars Rüdiger Kunow and Wilfried Raussert in their book *Cultural Memory and Multiple Identities* because they illuminate my analysis. They ask,

> How is memory renegotiated once it can no longer be fixed to one place, one culture, one community? How do we define cultural memory in terms of transnational processes of identity formation? How are we to define cultural memory while attempting to capture the essence of border crossings, contact zones and multiple communities? How are we to link cultural memory to the idea and presence of multiple identities, as they emerge from migration and multiple migrations in times of increasing globalization? What are the means and the media to which we resort in order to construct cultural memory in times of increasingly more fast-paced changes? How and where are multiple memories and multiple identities constructed? (2008, 12)

This chapter outlines how "radical indigenous mestizaje" and social memory are produced and expressed through MdM fashion.

**Felicia Montes's FE Clothing Line and Lisa Rocha's Ilaments Jewelry Line**

The FE Fashion Line, created in May 2009, consists of three original designs, which are conceived of by Felicia Montes and graphically designed and silkscreened by Joel "RageOne" Garcia, a Xicano artivist from East Los Angeles. The name of the clothing line is derived from the first two letters of Felicia's name. The Spanish word *fé* means "faith" in English, which is also Felicia's moniker. Felicia created and wore her first original fashion design, the *MeXicana Anahuac FE dress*, in the late 1990s as merchandise to be sold after her performances to promote and fund her artistic endeavors. Since 1997 Felicia has performed with the Indigenous mestiz@ spoken word and

powwow style drum group In Lak Ech (You are my other self) and has exhibited multimedia art installations and performed spoken word as an individual artist. These creative endeavors influenced Felicia's fashion design. Her mother Olivia Montes also inspires Felicia. Felicia says that her mother was part of the 1970s Chicano Student Movement in East Los Angeles and she was influenced by the "politics and style of Chicana and AIM activists" of the time. The FE dress however, became popular on its own and was rarely associated with Fe's performances. The demand for the FE dress grew, prompting Felicia to make an affordable, socially responsible and culturally relevant clothing line that would "allow women to see their bodies as sacred altars that they could adorn and take pride in." Felicia says *fé* or faith is "an important part of Xicana spirituality and politics. Spiritual-politics" with regards to FE clothing, she continues, "means that my designs and its buyers have an 'alter-Native'[68] relationship to the mainstream non-worker focused garment industry. This represents a commitment to a Xicana-Indígena spiritual-politic."[69] Felicia says she was inspired in her naming of the line "because all Xicanas have faith or should have faith in something…. Oftentimes, women of color's faith, their tenacity and spirituality, are the backbone of their families, communities and movements."

*Ilaments* is a combination of two words: "Ila," which is Hopi for "one who takes

[68] Here Felicia makes reference to Alicia Gaspar de Alba's notion of "alter-Nativity."

[69] In "Creativity and Cosmopolitanism: Women's Enduring Traditions" Janet Catherine Berlo argues, "In Plains, Plateau, and Great Basin Cultures, a dress is "not simply a utilitarian garment." Its functionality "extends into metaphysics; its artistry links human and spiritual realms" (2007, 97). Berlo's quote is a reminder that Indigenous aesthetics often express a spiritual dimension.

on challenges," combined with the word "elements" to produce "Ilaments."[70] Lisa's jewelry career began in 1997 when she earned an art degree from Pasadena City College with an emphasis in jewelry design and metalsmithing. In 1999 she worked as a Getty Foundation Multicultural Undergraduate Intern at Self-Help Graphics, a historic community arts center in East Los Angeles. Lisa held a second Getty Internship at the Armory Center for the Arts where she was an assistant to the art studio gallery director in 2000. It was during her internships that her interest in Mesoamerican history, art and culture grew. Lisa later worked as an assistant to two prominent jewelry designers: Jill Pearson of Wasabi Jewelry and Dana Kellin Jewelry. These experiences motivated Lisa to create her own culturally relevant jewelry line as an economic venture and as a creative outlet. Lisa's jewelry is inspired by the natural world synced with her Isleta Pueblo, Xicana and Mexican roots. The Navajo Psalm "to walk in beauty" inspires all her designs.

Felicia and Lisa's first experience as featured fashion show designers and models occurred at *Mi Vida Clothing Boutique's* 2009 "Por Vida Fashion Show," held annually at the South Pasadena store on Día de los Muertos. *Mi Vida Boutique* caters to women of color who want to share their heritages and politics through clothing. At that show, the designers identified *real* community "role" models and leaders to exhibit their lines. The "community role-models" selected were activists, artists, educators, local politicians and other people in leadership positions. Felicia commented, "I wanted to communicate a non-commercial, non-exploitive and community-centered message to the audience, especially to the youth. The fashion industry model is expected to be a specific weight,

[70] My analysis of the Ilaments Jewelry Line draws on three sources: 1) An interview I conducted with Lisa with on September 25, 2011; 2) An email communication with Lisa on July 30, 2014; and 3) Ilaments websites http://ilaments.com and http://instagram.com/ilaments/

height, color"—all judged by western values. She continues, "Intentionally switching up and using the term 'community *role*-models' challenges that idea of a 'model.'" In Indigenous Xicana fashion shows the role models become fashion models creating something new.

***The FE Clothing Line: A Visual Analysis of Three Designs***

The *MeXicana Anahuac* is the prototypic "FE" dress (see fig. 15). According to cultural theorist Rosa Linda Fregoso, the term "meXicana" refers to "the interface


Figure 15. Community role model Queline wearing *MeXicana Anahuac* t-dress by Felicia Montes.

between Mexicana and Chicana," pointing to the "historical, material, and discursive effects of contact zones and exchanges among various communities on the Mexico-U.S. border" (2003, xiv). Anáhuac is a Nahuatl word meaning "next to the water" or "on the coast."[71] In Indigenous mestiz@ circles the word has come to signify the western hemisphere, including North, Central and South America, synonymous with the pan-Indigenous concept "turtle island." Thus, *MeXicana Anahuac* speaks to the processes of transculturation and hybridity Indigenous peoples across the hemisphere have undergone through colonization, which is represented in the dresses imagery. Felicia says the dress features "the stylized *maíz* (corn) glyph, resembling a flat stamp found in Veracruz. An anatomical looking *corazón* (heart) is located over the woman's reproductive area. The veins of this corazón are drawn in the shape of a map of the American continent," both North and South America. From the ventricles of the heart's arteries two sacred elements rise: on the left fire, on the right, water. According the Felicia, "the heart of the *FE MeXicana Anahuac* dress honors these two sacred elements within all women." Felicia learned about the importance of fire and water "by participating in Indigenous ceremonial circles." Surrounding the heart and the elements fire and water are images of individualized corn kernels. Many Indigenous peoples across the Americas speak of humans being formed from corn. Corn (like the diversity of peoples who wear FE clothing) comes in different varieties. Fe claims that the *MeXicana Anahuac* dress "represents women as the heart of this diversity" while also living their lives in close association with "the sacred center of creation." Below the heart and corn images is a cross that Felicia says represents "the four directions: North, South, East, and West" and

[71] University of Oregon Online Nahuatl-English-Spanish dictionary. http://whp.uoregon.edu/dictionaries/nahuatl/

"the four elements (fire, water, wind and earth) and four colors and cultures (black, red, yellow and white)." The *MeXicana Anahuac* design is the only FE dress that has a written text. The letters F-E sit at the top of the dress, right below the neckline and centered in a diamond-shape reminiscent of the four directions. A corn stalk rises from the top of the "FE" and is surrounded by flowers. There is no actual sewn embroidery on this dress or on any of the FE dresses. The ancient embroidered look is created in the graphic design itself and printed on cloth through a silkscreen process. The *MeXicana Anahuac* FE dress is silkscreened to resemble the San Ángel or Puebla style embroidery that is commonly produced across Mexico for tourists. Traditionally, the cotton dress is long, vibrant and colorful with differently colored embroidered flowers along the neckline and the around the bottom.

The second dress in the FE line is called *Chiapaneca Heart* (see fig. 16). The stylized diamond shaped heart in the middle of the design is "inspired by women Zapatistas of the EZLN and the weaving and textile styles of Chiapas, Mexico." Felicia and Lisa were part of the first organized cultural exchange and dialogue-based gathering of Indigenous mestiz@s, Xican@s and Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico in 1997. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the gathering greatly influenced the cultural production and the spiritual and political practices of that generation of artivists in Los Angeles, known in the community as Generation Z. One particular act of solidarity by Indigenous mestizas was to support the Zapatista women's clothing cooperatives. The Zapatista women made and sold items for fair wages to support their families and their causes. Not only did Indigenous mestizas based in the U.S. purchase clothing made by Zapatista women, they also worked with Zapatista women's cooperatives by importing their items

Figure 16. Student role model Nayri Kalajian wearing *Chiapaneca Heart* t-shirt by Felicia Montes and *Fiesta Collection Floral Red Mother of Peal* earrings and *Frida Lucha Collection Frida Flower Pendant* by Lisa Rocha.

to the United States.[72] Felicia and other activists have worked in solidarity with the Zapatista revolutionary movement since the late–1990s. Felicia's experiences in Chiapas

[72] An example is Laura Palomares and Emma Pintado's *El Puente Hacia la Esperanza* (The Bridge Towards Hope) project, which imports fair-trade clothing and art from recognized Indigenous cooperatives across the Americas. They also host community-based artisan markets. It is important to point out that the title of this website is "the anti-mall: people b4 profit." This site provides "a space for ARTivists, Performers, and Conscious Consumers to come together and invest their money, time, and energy into putting PEOPLE b4 Profit." It should also be pointed out that the name of Palomares' and Pintado's non-profit import organization *El Puente Hacia la Esperanza* is a reference to the influential 1981 collection of writings by *Radical Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back*. *The Bridge Towards Hope* website can be found at www.theantimall.weebly.com

have manifested in her poetry, art, spirituality, politics, her personal style and also within the FE Clothing Line.

The *Chiapaneca Heart* design, in addition to Zapatista women's weaving styles, is based on Felicia's tattoo that she designed. She describes the tattoo image as "a cross that pierces a heart similar to the Sacred Heart of Jesus." According to Felicia, this tattoo symbolizes "the colonial Catholic Church that pierced Indigenous hearts and cultures. It references colonization and the so-called "discovery" of Indigenous peoples in the 'new world,' the Americas." Her tattoo is a visual representation of colonization. Within the edged heart on the *Chiapaneca Heart* dress is a small cross symbolizing the four directions. A heart-shaped shadow also outlines the Chiapaneca heart and cross. This pattern is repeated throughout the design in order to reinvent, through resemblance, a Mayan weaving style seen in Chiapanecan and Guatemalan *huipiles* (blouses or tunics), where the embroidery and imagery is small and very densely packed.

The final dress design in the FE clothing line is called *Tehuana Xicana* (see fig. 17). Mexican artist Frida Kahlo and artists of the Mexican mural movement painted the culture and traditions of women from Tehuantepec. Tehuanas in the southeastern Mexican state of Oaxaca have come to represent shared meXicana Indigenous pasts and a refusal to accept cultural inferiority and dependency.[73] Felicia shared with me that the *Tehuana Xicana* dress is inspired by contemporary Tehuana invented textiles and *huipiles*. This design features sun-like stylized marigold flowers that are squared off, similar to the *Chiapaneca Heart* dress, with the majority of the work around the neckline. *Cempazúchitl*, the Nahuatl word for the marigold flower, has served medicinal,

[73] According to art historian Oriana Baddeley, Tehuana style represents a "fertile unbowed body" in an "assertively" end-of-coloniality culture (2002, 586).

Figure 17. Community role model Mixpe Ley wearing *Tehuana Xicana* t-dress by Felicia Montes.

ceremonial, culinary and decorative purposes since ancient times. The bright orange and yellow cempazúchitl holds special significance in Day of the Dead celebrations. It is used to decorate the gravesite and *ofrendas* (special home altars) in order to draw departed loved ones back to earth through its intense fragrance.

Felicia explains that her fashion line is inspired by and caters to a diverse, creative clientele. Her designs are for people who wear clothing from their specific Indigenous cultures, or who mix Indigenous and Western clothing traditions. Felicia describes women's styles in Los Angeles:

> Each woman brings her own style to an outfit, often incorporating her own regional and alternative musical flair into the mix. She can wear a Chiapanecan *huipil* and *reboso* (shawl) from Michoacán with jeans and a cowboy hat. She might wear tennis shoes, or *huaraches* (leather sandals), boots (like cowboy, punk or army), or high heels. More often than not the clothing doesn't actually

> represent where their families and ancestors are from, like Chihuahua as in my case. These mixes represent urban Xicana-Indígena style—appreciating the diversity of the living Indigenous nations of the planet. My customers are mostly college-educated, they self-identify as people of color, and many are activists working for social justice.

The FE clothing line is sold at political, cultural, and educational events in Los Angeles and throughout the Southwest and on *Urban Xic*, an online cooperative marketplace that Felicia created with her partner Joel Garcia. *Urban Xic* was created for Los Angeles based socially conscious activist artists, musicians and designers who connect with Indigenous mestiz@ worldviews, that is, the spiritual-politics that call for respect, peace and dignity for all Indigenous peoples, to sell their merchandise. Felicia explains that the meaning of the term "Xic" stands for "Xican@—but some of her clients pronounce it as 'chic'—as in stylish clothing and fashion. The "X" for Felicia, instead of the "Ch" in Chican@, is about "acknowledging a commitment to remembering, recognizing and practicing our living ancestral Indigenous traditions." Felicia believes that Indigenous mestiz@s represent a movement and *Urban Xic* is the "*mercado* for the *movimiento* (market for the movement)." It should be noted that the American hemisphere has a rich pre-colonial history of cross-cultural trade. We can locate Indigenous trade centers and track the trade routes that flourished well before and after colonization.[74] Anthropologist Juan Vicente Palerm describes present day swap meets as a continuation of ancient Mesoamerican open-air marketplaces called *Tianguis*. *Urban Xic* is a contemporary Indigenous marketplace and trade center and a continuation of these Indigenous traditions.

[74] These trade routes can be seen on the 1590-1800 map in *Identity by Design* edited by Emil Her Many Horses (2007). Indigenous studies scholars Martina Masaquiza (Salasaka Kechwa) and Pakal B'alam (Kaqchikel Mayan) argue, "Long ago, our indigenous ancestors traded over vast distances. We suggest that we need to build a new infrastructure of political and economic exchange" (2000, 7).

***The Ilaments Jewelry Line: A Visual Analysis of the Día de los Muertos Collection***

Lisa Rocha designs and produces many themed collections in her Ilaments jewelry line including "Flor y Canto," "Boho Chula," "Loverboy," "Sueño," "Fiesta," "#CholaBoss," "Sugar Skull," "Palabra," "Talavera," "Prayer," "Frida Lucha" and "Día de los Muertos." Her latest collection for 2014 is called "Mexi-Lux." In recounting her experiences working for mainstream designers, Lisa commented that she was motivated to start her own jewelry line because, "I didn't really see a reflection of my own self. I didn't see a reflection of my own culture. I didn't see cultural icons that I related to, color that I related to, story that I related to." The *calavera, papel picado*, flowers and other Day of the Dead iconography are featured in Lisa's most popular collection, "Día de los Muertos" created in 2000.

Day of the Dead, a Mexican festival celebrated on November 1 and 2, is a tradition that dates back roughly three thousand years to a variety of Mesoamerican festivals of the Olmec, Mexica (Aztec), Zapotec, Mixtec, Maya, P'urhépecha, and Totonac civilizations. Even though these groups did not share a common language, they shared the cosmological view of transformation and the continuous cycle of life, which includes death. Death was thought to give life—when one returns to the earth, they restore the natural balance. One festival was dedicated to the Mexica deity of the underworld, Mictlancihuatl who was the caretaker of the eternal cycle of life and death. Another festival was held in honor of the traditional agricultural cycle. The termination of the maiz harvest was celebrated on the first full moon in November. It was believed that souls were able to return to earth to share in the festivities with their living relatives. In Mesoamerica, death was not the final end to life, but simply viewed as a transformation.

Day of the Dead combines Indigenous beliefs and Catholic customs inherited in colonial times. In the Roman Catholic tradition there are days dedicated to the saints. November 1 is All Saints Day, when prayers are offered to the saints. These are the souls who have reached heaven. November 2 is All Souls Day, when prayers are said for the souls in purgatory to help them get into heaven. Christians who celebrate All Saints Day and All Souls Day do so in the fundamental belief that there is a prayerful spiritual bond between the deceased and the living. In Mexico, these religious traditions are known as Día de los Inocentes and Los Fieles Difuntos. In Mexico, the idea of souls or spirits interacting with the living is an enduring Indigenous belief that manifests in contemporary celebrations. Thus, Day of the Dead is a celebration that blends Indigenous and Catholic traditions.

Day of the Dead iconography has been utilized by many Indigenous mestiz@ artists, including Lisa Rocha. Each piece in her Día de los Muertos collection features the signature hand stamped text *Vida y Muerte* (Life and Death), recalling ancestral understandings of the natural cycle of life and the cosmological view of transformation (See figs. 18 and 19). Calaveras, the most prominent image on each piece in the collection, represent an allusion to death and remind the living that death is ever-present. Each handmade Ilaments necklace and bracelet has the signature "misplaced bead." According to Lisa this reflects "the Native American belief and philosophy that stands for our human imperfections and to remind us we are not like the creator who can only create perfection." The pieces also feature brightly colored flowers that sit atop the calavera, reminiscent of the flowers placed on *ofrendas*, special altars, dedicated in memory of deceased loved ones. An act of ceremonial remembrance, ofrendas are created in two


Figure 18. Ilaments *Día De Los Muertos Eternal Arracada Collection*18kt GF earrings by Lisa Rocha.

Figure 19. Ilaments *Puro Vida Sugarskull* necklace by Lisa Rocha.

main locations: the cemetery and in the home. Through her Día de los Muertos jewelry line, Lisa generates a third location of ceremonial remembrance: the Indigenous mestiz@ body. By wearing Lisa's jewelry, Indigenous mestiz@ bodies become ofrendas, sacred altars that express ancestral memory through a "radical indigenous mestizaje."[75]

**The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show *and/or***
**An Organizing Manual for Putting on a Community-Based Fashion Event**

No matter how fused, hybrid, syncretic, challenging, no matter how much we do regale past traditions, or embrace new traditions of indigeneity, an urban Indigenous mestiz@ fashion show, like any powwow, any ceremony, like any course at the university, must be organized. This section is written as an "Organizing Manual" [76] for generating your own community-based fashion show or art event. The manual is an instructional case study of the 2010 Indigenous mestiz@ fashion event "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show." All participants willing to organize a community-based fashion show become integral to a collective that is committed to equalizing power between participants. Together, the goal is to become caretakers of the cultural forms the group agrees to promote. Organizing a community-based fashion event requires five organizing groups, which we referred to as crews. They are: 1) The Pathfinder; 2) The Budget and Fundraising Crew; 3) The Creativity Crew; 4) The Public Relations and Advertising Crew; and 5) The Designer Liaison Crew. Individuals sign up to work with a crew according to whether they want to use their own already existing skills, or whether they want to learn new skills. The names of the crews may vary

[75] Chicana feminist theologian Lara Medina has noted Chicana/o reclamations of Day of the Dead are acts of "spiritual and cultural healing" (2004).

[76] This manual follows the trajectory of handbooks written by leftist scholar activists including: *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* edited by Wilson and Yellow Bird (2005); the great organizer's handbook written by Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (1971); and *Beginner's Guide to Community-Based Arts* by Schwarzman (2005).

depending on what your collective decides, but the responsibilities of each are described in detail to assist your collective get organized.

***The Pathfinder***

If you are a collective, you need to identify one point person to be "The Pathfinder." This person oversees the entire event and connects and keeps communication lines open between all crews. The Pathfinder delegates tasks and makes sure they are completed in a timely manner. This person also assures that crews are in communication with each other, and that unexpected issues that arise get addressed. The other part of this job is to keep the other crewmembers excited, engaged and inspired. This can be done by showing videos of Indigenous fashion shows from around the globe to cull ideas and use them as springboards for discussion. A vital job of The Pathfinder is to act as mediator between everyone involved. This person helps the group identify the resources, knowledge sets and skills each individual possesses that might be utilized by the collective. I recommend you come up with general agreements to help your group form a collective where all voices are heard.

***Budget and Fundraising Crew***

Your collective should address the issue of money and budgeting early in the organizing phase. You may need money to pull off an event like this—though with some ingenuity there are ways to put on a show with little to no *actual* money. You might solicit local businesses for monetary as well as in-kind donations.[77] You can get almost

[77] An example of a donation solicitation letter can be found in Appendix E. Your group can send this letter to potential businesses to seek monetary contributions and/or in-kind donations. After the letter is sent via email or snail mail, I recommend that you follow up by phone and schedule a face-to-face meeting with the potential donor. Make sure that you keep track of who donates what to your event so that you can name them as co-sponsors on all advertising materials including the event program. Ask donors with storefront businesses if you can deliver posters and flyers so that they can help you to advertise your fashion show. I also recommend that you send all donors a personalized note thanking them for their

everything donated "in-kind" (meaning donors will give you goods, commodities and services instead of cash). You will have to decide whether it is feasible or not to hold a fundraiser or to write a grant. You need to begin by first creating a realistic budget. This budget may include itemized costs such as 1) venue rental; 2) permits; 3) furniture rentals (chairs, tables, tablecloths); 4) sound system and technology rentals (PA system: speakers, microphones, stands, cables, lighting); 5) decorations; 6) honorariums and/or transportation costs for the fashion designer(s) or other performers/artists if necessary; and 7) printing costs for advertising materials. If you are connected to a university, I recommend soliciting campus departments and organizations for co-sponsorship funds. Our group decided that our event would be a "benefit" show: any money we made over costs would be donated to a worthy cause. But your group may want to forego fundraising altogether. Another option is to charge admission to pay for the event. This can be risky. You would have to find a way to pay for all your expenses up front—and then, if you make enough money, issue reimbursements after the show.

Whatever route you decide to take, you still need to have a budget. Once the budget is created, it should be presented to the collective group for approval. Next, seek out local businesses (restaurants, coffee shops or community centers) willing to provide a venue for free or in trade. If students are involved as organizers, I recommend trying to book a free site on campus. You also have to find out if your venue requires permits. Do they provide chairs, tables and tablecloths? How about a sound system? Does the site provide someone (a staff member) to run the sound system and provide technical support? (If not, I recommend finding someone within your collective who can act as

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generous contribution shortly after the event takes place. It is especially important to build relationships with local businesses if you intend to organize another fashion show or other cultural event in the future.

your sound tech). Does your potential venue have a stage or an area that could serve as the runway? If not, you have to rent them, make them, or get them donated. I recommend finding a venue that offers an all-inclusive package at a reasonable price.

***Creativity Crew***

Once the venue is booked, it is time to pass the torch to the Creativity Crew. What do you envision for your space? What kind of experience do you want to create for the audience? What moods will you set, what ideological positions do you want to display, what aesthetic choices will you make? Our collective decided on a theme (rather, a color scheme) and made a list of items required. Our group read two articles, Mohawk theorist Beth Brant's article "The Good Red Road:  Journeys of Homecoming in Native Women's Writing" and Chicana philosopher and poet Gloria Anzaldúa's essay "Tlilli, Tlapalli (Classical Nahuatl for "Writing," "Wisdom"): The Path of the Red and Black Ink." Collective discussion of these articles led to the group's choice of the fashion show's theme: "The Good Red Road" and a red and black color scheme. Later, the group added a subtitle "Cultura Conscious Fashion," which is the tag line on Felicia Montes' *Urban Xic* webstore. The Creativity Crew is responsible for purchasing the decorations (within the budget constraints) and/or getting items donated. This crew also decides how to construct the "runway" and seating area for the audience (see Figure 21). You may want to construct a raised runway or designate a path on the floor. Use your imagination!

***Designer Liaison Crew***

Your group should come together and ask of its organizers: What are the fashions you want to exhibit? Whose fashions display that style? Let's say that you organize a fashion show around one or more Indigenous designers. The Designer Liaison Crew's job

is to contact those designers and encourage them to be a part of your fabulous show. My advice is to contact the featured designer(s) immediately to confirm their interest and availability (and determine if they require an honorarium). Some designers will agree to participate in your fashion show to promote their line or mission.[78] The Designer Liaison Crew also recruits the models from within the collective or by seeking them out externally. Sometimes your designer will recommend models. In your fashion show you might want the models to become "role models." If so, ask yourself: What if your models take on the *persona* of a role model that they themselves choose? You might ask each model what *kind* of role model *they* want to represent when they walk the runway. You can even ask them which *parts of themselves* they want to *highlight* as they walk the runway. What kind of fashioning is important to them to emphasize through their attire, jewelry, make-up, hairstyles and other forms of adornment? What messages, what feelings, what forms of being do they want to convey? What would happen if models become conscious of these feelings—and dress them—*before* they journey down the runway? How would models be seen and experienced differently if they first re-conceive the ways they see themselves?

The Designer Liaison Crew must compile the designer's biographies and photos for publicity purposes (share this with The Public Relations and Advertising Crew); gather the runway music (give this to the Sound System/Tech Support Liaison during the dress rehearsal the day of the event); collect the models' clothing sizes and send them to the designers in a timely manner; and organize a mandatory dress rehearsal before the show. This crew determines what items the designer provides (for example, clothing,

[78] We paid our featured designer Felicia Montes a one hundred dollar stipend and covered her transportation costs. She was also one of our vendors, so she was able to sell her merchandise to the public who came to watch and participate in the show.

shoes, and/or jewelry) and reminds models to bring options for other forms of clothing to wear in combination with the designer's items. Attending to the designer the day of the show is another responsibility crucial to the success of the day. An *optional* role one or more members of the Designer Liaison Crew may take on is that of the ***Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew.***

If you want to include an artisan craft fair as a part of your fashion show, then you will need to take on an additional responsibility. The final effect of this role is to produce a kind of living gallery of the contemporary arts and crafts now being produced, traded and sold by Indigenous peoples: that is what an arts and crafts marketplace is. The job of the Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew is to acknowledge the skills of community artisans who apply to be a part of the craft fair; to build relationships with these artists; and to showcase a vital array of cultural objects and wares. To do this job, begin by coordinating with the Creativity Crew to determine how many vendors can be accommodated at your site. Then, compile a list of artisan vendors. There are many ways to do this. But first be sure to offer a space to your featured designer(s) and any other artists or performers who are participating in your show. Next, if you still have space at your site, seek contacts from all crewmembers. Does your city host an artisan, flea or farmer's market? Seek out artists there. Maybe you have too many vendors to include. How to decide? Create and send an application form to evaluate.[79] Decide if you want to charge a registration fee to accepted vendors, which is another potential source of income for your group. Select vendors whose art will not compete with the work of your featured designer. For example, if you feature a jewelry designer in your show I recommend you consider not

[79] A sample vendor invitation and application is provided in Appendix F. I recommend that The Pathfinder approve your letter and application before sending them out to vendors.

inviting another jeweler (you don't want create a competitive situation for vendors that limits their income). Check with the Budget and Fundraising Crew: have they secured tables and chairs for your vendors? If not, let your vendors know they need to provide their own. It is important to maintain an up-to-date list of your confirmed vendors. Call each one forty-eight hours before the show to confirm their participation. Be prepared for last minute cancellations—the Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew's job is to contact potential replacements and to attend to the vendors the day of the show.

Our collective decided to have a raffle and we gave this task to the Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew. The crew gathered and gift wrapped donated raffle items from vendors and crewmembers. Rather than charging vendors a registration fee, our group asked for a contribution to the raffle. Audience members were given one raffle ticket with their paid entrance. Giveaways and gift giving are common in Native celebrations and ceremonies and so our collective decided that a raffle was a good fit for our event. Your group may want to consider giving a gift or thank you card to anyone who supported your efforts, such as the featured designers, volunteers and donors. The possibilities are unlimited when it comes to showcasing artists at your fashion event. Instead of a craft market, maybe you will invite musicians, graffiti, tattoo or makeup artists, a D.J. or a poet.

***Public Relations and Advertising Crew***

The Public Relations and Advertising Crew promotes the event to the public. They determine: Who is your target audience? How can you encourage them to attend the show? This crew designs all advertising materials including posters, flyers and press releases and then they distribute them.[80] The Public Relations and Advertising Crew

[80] One of our crewmembers was inspired by our project to design and draw an image that was used on all advertising materials. She also created a large backdrop mural for the show (See Figure 22).

should solicit media sponsors for free advertising space. Begin by contacting local newspapers and radio stations. Next, advertise your event on social media sites. Make sure any printing costs stay within the budget set by the Budget and Fundraising Crew. The Public Relations and Advertising Crew is in charge of designing and distributing advertising materials, but all crewmembers should help with promotions.[81] Another task is to design the printed fashion show program to distribute to the audience. Gather your program content from the Designer Liaison Crew and Budget and Fundraising Crew: the order of the day's events, the MC's name (usually someone selected from within your group), designer bios and photos, the names of the models, the finalized list of vendors, names of any other artists, names of all donors and anything else you want to include. Leave one program on each chair for the audience or pass them out at the door.

***SHOWTIME! The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show***

On Thursday December 9, 2010 "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show" took place at Casa de La Raza in Santa Barbara, California. That morning the ***Budget and Fundraising Crew*** set up a table at the entrance to the venue to greet and direct all volunteers, artists, guests and members of the audience. More importantly, the Budget and Fundraising Crew was charged with collecting entrance fees from the audience and handing out the raffle tickets. They had change on hand and a lock box to store the money.[82] A few days before the event they made sure all budget items were reconciled, including getting the checks cut for the fashion designers honorarium.

[81] We had an advertising push two weeks prior to our fashion show. Crewmembers invited their friends in person and through our social media event page. They hung posters around town, made announcements in classes and passed out flyers.

[82] If your group decides to change an entrance fee, it may be beneficial to look into obtaining *Square* or other application so audience members can pay with a debit or credit card.

On the day of the event the ***Creativity Crew***, along with volunteers, decorated the venue with donated red roses and black and red balloons. They also made red tissue paper flowers from donated materials and placed one on each chair for audience members to take home, along with the program (see fig. 20), which was created by the Public Relations and Advertising Crew. The Creativity Crew was charged with constructing the runway. Fortunately, our venue had sturdy three feet high by three feet wide by six feet long solid wooden boxes normally used as columns. They laid three flat, covered them with donated red tablecloths to raise a beautiful eighteen-foot long runway (see fig. 21). Chairs were set up on either side to accommodate an audience of eighty. The Creativity Crew also worked behind the scenes to ensure a successful show. They were in close communication with The Pathfinder and the Fashion Designer Liaison Crew using walkie-talkies or cell phones. The Creativity Crew also attended to any miscellaneous tasks during the show including re-filling the bathroom toilet paper and cleaning up spills. After the show was over they took down the decorations, broke down the stage and cleaned the site.[83]

The ***Fashion Designer/Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew*** worked to support the featured fashion designers, models, vendors and other artists. Designers Felicia Montes and Lisa Rocha arrived to the site a few hours before the show. They met with the ***Fashion Designer Liaison Crew*** and the eleven student role models for the dress rehearsal. Each role model tried on each of their two outfits and practiced walking the runway to music. We also had a sound check during the dress rehearsal, working closely

[83] Your site may have custodial staff who can help the Creativity Crew or who will take on this job altogether. If not, ask if they provide cleaning supplies like a broom, mop, bucket, rags, trash bags, soap, Clorox, scrubbers, etc.

## Co-Sponsors

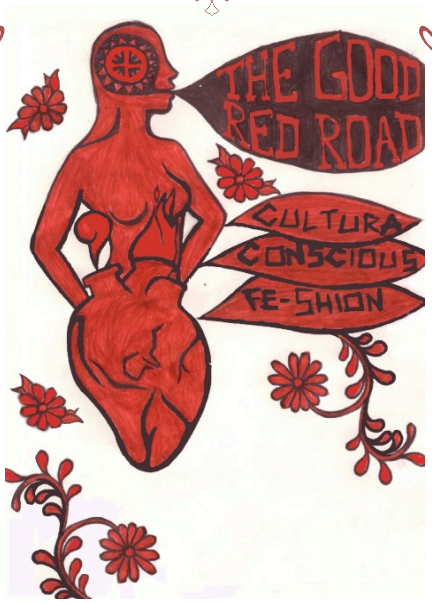
Students of Feminist Studies 185AG

Del Pueblo Café
www.facebook.com/pages/Del-Pueblo-Cafe

All proceeds from this event will benefit Casa de la Raza youth programs. Founded in 1971 on the Eastside of Santa Barbara, La Casa de la Raza was created as a non-profit community center to empower the Latino community by affirming and preserving cultural heritage, providing an umbrella of services, and by advocating for participation in the larger community.

Donations to Casa de La Raza are kindly welcomed.

This fashion show is dedicated to all the fierce fashionistas who produce culturally conscious wear for our community and who actively seek to redefine fashion and aesthetics. Thank you Felicia Montes and Lisa Rocha for all the work that you do.




Thursday November 9, 2010
Casa De La Raza
601 East Montecito Street
Santa Barbara, CA. 93103

## Featured Designers

Felicia Montes is a Xicana Indigenous artist, activist, academic, community/event organizer, and poet/performer/MC from the Los Angeles area. She is Coordinating member of the groundbreaking creative collectives Mujeres de Maiz and In Lak Ech and co-founder of Urban Xic "the Mercado for the movimiento." She is a graduate of UCLA, CSUN, and soon Otis College of Art & Design with an MFA in Public Practice Art.


Ilaments jewelry was founded in 1999 by Lisa Rocha, a Chicana designer based in Los Angeles, who is recognized for incorporating meaningful & cultural stories into each handmade piece. The company name is a marriage of two words: the designer's Native American name "Ila" meaning "one who takes on challenges" and the word "ments" stemming from the word "elements."

## Schedule

6:00 pm Cultural Marketplace
7:30 pm Welcome by Amber Rose González
Opening Ceremony by Felicia Montes
7:45 Fashion Show

## Role Models

| | |
|---|---|
| Lizette | Alyssa |
| Cristina | Nayri |
| Viridiana | Elizabeth |
| Janet | Dora |
| Shantal | Courtlin |
| Jesse | Marie |

Figure 20. "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show" program.

Figure 21. The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion Show runway and backdrop mural.

with the ***Sound System/Tech Support Liaison*** who was an employee of the venue. In your case it may be a crewmember from within your collective. Either way, it is important that this person attends the dress rehearsal, conducts a sound check and tests the runway music. During the actual show, the Sound System/Tech Support Liaison runs the PA system and troubleshoots technical difficulties. A few hours before the show, the ***Vendor/Artist Liaison Crew*** helped to set up the "Cultural-Conscious Craft Fair," (see

Figure 22. “Cultural-Conscious Craft Fair” Vendor Cultura y Mas.

fig. 22) which took place both before and after the fashion show. [84] They invited fifteen vendors and five confirmed and participated. These five included our two featured designers Felicia Montes and Lisa Rocha, Cultura y Mas (a designs, graphics, and clothing company), Michael Gonzalez, a New Mexican Chile vendor (and my dad), and Mujeres Unidas por Justicia, Educación y Revolución (MUJER), an undergraduate student organization from UC Santa Barbara that sold tacos, desserts and *aguas frescas.*

[84] Typically vendors set up their art and crafts on one six-foot conference table, or in a 10’x10’ area that can fit three six-foot tables set up in a “U” shape. Allow vendors at least two hours to unload and set up both before and after the show.

The ***Public Relations and Advertising Crew*** was charged with documenting the event and posting photographs and videos on social media sites. Before the show the crew asked all designers, models, artists, performers and vendors to sign a media release form. I recommend your group organize a special "after show" viewing party to celebrate your efforts. You can add the video of *your* urban Indigenous fashion show to the many now circulating on the web.

All our planning and preparation was complete and now it was time for the event to begin. Doors opened at 6:00pm and audience members shopped at the "Cultural-Conscious Craft Fair" for an hour and a half before The Pathfinder got on the mic and welcomed all those in attendance. The event officially began with a Chumash Welcome song. The MCs (Mujeres en Ceremonia as they were referred to) asked every attendee to join in repeating sacred vocables in order to recognize and honor the first peoples of the land where the event took place. The MCs played Native-style hand drums, encouraging the crowd to join in the soundings. Another MC burned a sage bundle moving its smoke throughout the audience. These acts are "perform-antics" designed to intervene in the normative or hegemonic fashion show narrative flow. In an Indigenous mestiz@ fashion show such interventions in colonial normativity can occur at any moment. The effect creates a whole other relationship to hegemonic narrativity in general. After the ceremonial opening was complete, the D.J. brought the music up slowly and set the lighting for the first student role model to make her walk down the runway.

One by one, eleven student role models displayed their outfits while Felicia and Lisa narrated the stories behind each piece. The audience applauded and hollered, took pictures and moved to the music. As the final student role model finished her strut,

Felicia, Lisa and the other ten models joined her on the stage. They all took a bow and the audience gave them a standing ovation. One of the student role models stepped forward and presented Felicia and Lisa with a gift of white California sage and framed art. The raffle and craft fair followed the fashion show, which concluded at 9:00pm. The event was a great success!

I see organizing a community-based fashion show or art event like a sport: You get better with practice. Rely on your teammates; don't be afraid of making mistakes. Use this Organizing Manual and map out your game plan. I recommend you meet once or twice a week over a ten to sixteen week period to make plans. In these interactive meetings crewmembers provide updates, advice, suggestions and encouragement to each other. Our group left fifteen minutes at the end of each planning and organizing meeting to come together as a large group to evaluate our relationships to the organizing experience. We stressed horizontal communication that left room for both organizational feedback as well as personal feedback—what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "inner work, public acts."

**Post-Fashion Show Remarks**

> Creative acts are forms of political activism. They employ definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms, and are not merely aesthetic exercises. Inherent in the creative act is a spiritual, psychic component. We build culture as we inscribe in these forms.
>
> —Gloria Anzaldúa *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990, xxiv).

This chapter demonstrated how MdM fashion generates hybrid "perform-antics" and expresses a "radical indigenous mestizaje." The Indigenous mestiz@ fashioners discussed here are in an imaginative negotiation between continuity and transformation.

For these designers, there is no one set method to creating an urban Indigenous mestiz@ fashion show. The fashions surveyed here "do not enforce current forms of fashion, do not return fashion to some pre-contact clothing tradition, do not dictate" what Indigenous mestiz@ "attire should look like for the twenty-first century."[85] Rather, MdM fashion "rides on the edges of symbol and meaning on behalf of liberation."[86] The MdM fashion show was creatively organized to provide alternatives to dominant ways of seeing ourselves through hegemonic conceptions of beauty and dominant understandings of Chican@ identity. This chapter has shown how Indigenous mestiz@s engage symbols, meanings and ideologies from various dominant and "alter-native" traditions into their fashion, expressing a "radical indigenous mestizaje." Urban Indigenous mestiz@ fashion shows "perform acts of creative resistance that rewrite the body and the being as it moves through contemporary societies;" the MdM fashion show is a reminder of "histories that existed and continue to exist in spite of layers of colonization and capitalist appropriation."[87] This chapter has shown how MdM fashions and activist scholarship are constructed with "decolonizing perform-antics" for awakening the imagination.

[85] From "Urban Indigenous Fashion Shows: An Experimentally Scripted Feminist Ethnography." This article is co-authored by Chela Sandoval, Amber Rose González and Felicia Montes and is currently under submission for publication.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

## Conclusion

This dissertation examines the political and creative practices of Mujeres de Maiz (MdM/Women of the Corn), an Indigenous mestiz@ led feminist of color visual and performing arts collective based in Los Angeles. Since their inception in 1997, Mujeres de Maiz has used politically and spiritually charged art that aims to challenge social injustices, revise dominant cultural representations and build meaningful communities across differences. The research was drawn from a dual method approach: textual analysis and participant observation ethnography with the MdM collective from 2009 to 2014 to examine how urban Indigenous mestiz@s represent themselves in textual and social spaces. Few studies have paid attention to constructions of Chicano indigeneity, and fewer still to feminist indigeneity, in the twenty-first century that exists outside of Chicano nationalist and "Chican@ indigenist" paradigms.

In contrast, this work examines the ways women shape, transform and extend Chican@ indigeneity and express manifestations of a "radical indigenous mestizaje" through their artivism. This research seeks to propel Chican@ Studies towards making room for a transnational feminist, hemispheric and grounded approach to indigeneity by demonstrating that these approaches are already being constructed on the ground. The dissertation contributes to historicizing Indigenous mestiz@ artivism and connects these stories to U.S. third world feminist traditions. An investigation of the Mujeres de Maiz collective enables an informed understanding of emerging urban Indigenous mestiz@ identities and the influence of feminist consciousness and artivism in Los Angeles.

The study begins with a report on the qualitative method of participant observation ethnography used in the research. Using different forms of storytelling

including epistolary techniques, reflexive ethnography, "autobioethnography" developed by Norma Cantú and "autohistoria-teoría" developed by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, I introspectively detailed the challenges and opportunities of engaging in a participatory community-based research project. I self-consciously narrate my personal, ethical and emotional experiences as an "activist-researcher community organizer" as a means to examine my own social roles, identities and behaviors in the production of this project. At the end of the chapter I share my characterization of engaged community work and offer a blueprint for Indigenous mestiz@ activist-scholar with liberatory goals.

In order to understand the political and creative practices of MdM, in Chapter Two I contextualize its work in an evolving body of scholarship that considers Chican@ historical and theoretical constructions of indigeneity and mestizaje expressed in cultural production. Specifically I examine how cultural critics and feminist theorists have conceptualized Aztlán, indigeneity, and mestizaje in three parallel phases: 1) Chicano Movement, 2) Chicana feminist and 3) "radical indigenous mestizaje." The concept I name "radical indigenous mestizaje" is conceived of and deployed strategically as a descriptive term and living cultural practice that intervenes in the legacy of colonial discourse and repressive racial constructs as it makes room for new resistant subjectivities and epistemologies. Radical indigenous mestizaje is compared to what liberation philosopher Chela Sandoval calls "differential consciousness." Radical indigenous mestizaje and differential consciousness are expressions of liberatory subject positions that emerge from and work to interrupt and transform dominant conceptualizations of being and relationships within the social order. Through creative-spiritual-political-cultural texts and embodied practices, MdM artists activate a radical

indigenous mestizaje, allowing them to negotiate and reconfigure ethics and belief systems, reconstruct subjectivities and communal histories and transform the collective imagination in the name of social justice. Radical indigenous mestizaje is a theory of aesthetics that facilitates a way to understand identity formation. The historical and theoretical considerations surveyed in Chapter Two provide the frameworks I utilize to examine the cultural productions generated by the MdM collective.

I introduce the MdM collective, its history and a biographical profile of three core member-organizers in Chapter Three. I show MdM is a contemporary, grassroots radical women of color collective that works at the interstices of traditionally defined social movements. I connect the work of MdM to an enduring practice of cooperative women of color artistic activism. I introduce the organization's interdependent and collective structure describing it as an extended network comprised of interlocking artivist circles.

Chapter Four provides a cultural critique of the 13th anniversary MdM zine *Flor y Canto: 13 Baktun Return of the Wisdom of Elders,* which is a compilation of past zine entries originally published between 1997 and 2009. In this chapter I analyze *13 Baktun* as both aesthetic object and socio-historical document. Doing so provides insight into contemporary Indigenous mestiz@ and women of color consciousness, politics and grassroots modes of media and artistic production. I begin by situating the MdM zines within the historical context of women of color literary production, with a focus on alternative non-commercial publishing practices. I then discuss zines and poetic forms in building this women of color literary movement, with a brief discussion of audience and readership. This chapter also includes a description of Chicana literary criticism, which informs my reading of *13 Baktun*. I identify violence and love as the central motif in the

zine. Violence and love appear as complementary elements, that is, a dualism that represents the overarching frame of the zine. Embedded in the zine entries are expressions of ancestral memory and a transnational, planetary and women-centered indigeneity—a "radical indigenous mestizaje." Collectively these stories make up an archive for self-preservation. I claim that *13 Baktun*, a feminist of color anthology, works beyond socially constructed binary oppositions of theory/activism, academia/ community, professional/non-professional writing, public/private and oral/written expression that forged new models for feminist communities where the self is constructed in relation to others (Franklin 1997; Arteaga 1997). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the community generated through reading *13 Baktun* and my reflections on the zine as cultural intervention.

Finally, my interest in Chapter Five was to analyze indigeneity as expressed in Indigenous mestiz@ clothing and fashion shows. I examine two MdM member's fashion lines and the urban Indigenous mestiz@ fashion show "The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious FEshion" that I coordinated in 2010 with MdM designers and student organizers as a case study. At the end of the chapter, I return to an enactment of participant observation ethnography in my analysis of the fashion show. I provide an "Organizing Manual" as an instructional case study for generating a community-based fashion show or art event as my final contribution to this mode of activist scholarship. Thus, the dissertation is comprised of case studies *and* models of activist scholarship.

There are various and wide-reaching social implications of artivism, or art and culture that advance social justice. Studies have shown community art encourages civic engagement, builds and deepens community ties among residents, develops social

networks and local economies, makes visible local cultural assets and resources, lessens the likelihood of depression, helps kids excel in school, has been linked to lower rates of chronic illness and poor health and improves social well-being overall (Barndt 2011; Sandoval and Rodriguez 2012; Stern 2013; The Culture Group 2014). The Culture Group, a collaboration of social change experts and creative producers, argue that artists are able to inspire people to action in more meaningful ways and on a larger scale than policy makers, academics or professionals. This is because art is: 1) "emotional:" it connects with people beyond the rational, tapping into deeper levels of consciousness opening them up to new possibilities; it is 2) "visionary:" art can help us imagine alternative possibilities by enacting new and experimental ways of being; it is 3) "systemic:" art examines institutional inequities and often challenges systems of power, helping us to envision change on a large-scale; it is 4) "popular:" art can make complex social processes and theories accessible through creative mediums; and finally art is 5) "bold:" art is often direct and courageous in ways that politicians, policy makers, academics and the media are not (2014, 7). Accordingly, artivism is particularly important for women and youth of color who are often the most marginalized populations in urban areas. Outlets are needed. The artivism of Mujeres de Maiz provides critical outlets in Los Angeles and beyond through connections with translocal and transnational issues and global movements. MdM works to revise dominant cultural representations, to decolonize the collective imagination, to advance social justice, and to build meaningful communities across differences. This work has inspired the creation of new collectives in Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Ana, California and in Houston and El Paso, Texas that mirror MdM's vision and infrastructure. In addition, Mujeres de Maiz university

chapters have been created at California State University, Los Angeles and Monterey Bay. Mujeres de Maiz serves as a model for longevity, which is rare for grassroots activist collectives and organizations.

**Practical Applications and Future Research Directions**

Mujeres de Maiz is a multi-layered organization, that is, their membership consists of core members, artistic and spiritual mentors and core event organizers and volunteers who come together around the spring season of events. Over time the core members have become an advisory entity to the collective and core event organizers have taken on a more active role. At the end of 2014, after a long period of consideration, MdM decided to take the steps to become a nonprofit organization. A new board of directors has been formed for the nonprofit and I have accepted the invitation to sit on the board to help MdM implement its vision and goals. The vision for the new nonprofit is to build and grow a formalized artivist network and to institutionalize programming and publishing activities. MdM is committed to cultivating future generations of artivists. One noteworthy goal that demonstrates this commitment is the development of MdM arts curriculum and cultural programming in partnership with local high schools. In my capacity as board member and in-house researcher, I am currently working with MdM on two major projects. The first is an edited anthology that will commemorate the collective's 20$^{th}$ anniversary in 2017. Other core members are organizing a 20-year retrospective art exhibit. The second major project is gathering MdM ephemera to generate an archive that will house their permanent collection.

Future research directions include analyzing audience interviews and questionnaires to write a report on the outcomes of MdM artivism in Los Angeles. In

addition, I will analyze my existing data including audience interviews and questionnaires, performer interviews, MdM interviews and digital recordings of performances at the Live Art Shows to continue to develop my theory of "radical indigenous mestizaje" for a manuscript.

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## Appendix A: Consent To Participate

**PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand women of color identity and cultural practices, focusing on experiences at the Mujeres de Maiz live art show in East Los Angeles, California. This study seeks to understand how and why women build community and come together in multicultural artistic, political, spiritual spaces. PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate, we will discuss your experiences at the MDM show for approximately one hour at a location of your choosing. The interview will be recorded with the digital device that you feel most comfortable with, either a voice or video recorder. A follow up interview is not likely, but may be necessary within one year of the original interview date.

The duration of this study is 18 months and approximately 20 participants will be interviewed.

**RISKS:** There is only a minimal inconvenience associated with your participation in this study, including your time. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering any question you have the option to pass. You may end the interview at any point if you feel uncomfortable for any reason, without question.

**BENEFITS:** There is no direct benefit to you anticipated from your participation in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, since research documents are not protected from subpoena. This study will be furnished to the University of California library system and published as a doctoral dissertation, which are public documents. Safeguards will be taken to protect your identity. You have the option of using a pseudonym and using voice instead of video recording.
□ I wish for my birth name to be used in the study.
□ I wish to be assigned a pseudonym for all documentation, data storage and resulting publications for the study.

**QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions about this research project or if you think you may have been injured as a result of your participation, please contact:
Amber Rose González | arg@umail.ucsb.edu
PO BOX 14042 Santa Barbara, California 93107-404

If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at (805) 893-3807 or hsc@research.ucsb.edu or write to the University of California, Human Subjects Committee, Office of Research, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-2050
PLEASE RETAIN THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS.

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

### Respondent's Background

- Tell me about how your family came to live in Los Angeles and the neighborhood you were raised in. [Ethnic and class makeup, descriptions, stories, changed over time?]
- How do your parents and immediate family racially/ethnically identity themselves? [Do you relate to the way they identify?]
- How do you describe the way you see yourself as a person, in terms of identity? [Influences, 3 words of significance; stories of how you've come to understand your identity]
- What do you think of the category Woman of Color? Do you identify with it in any way? [Do you identify with feminism in any way?]
- How would you describe your style/aesthetic? [Dress, practices, home décor, artwork]
- What religion/spiritual traditions were you raised with and who was your biggest influence? Have your spiritual practices and beliefs changed over time?
- What role does Chicana/Indigenous/Women of Color visual art and culture play in your life, in shaping your identity and your work? Other influences? Who/what inspires you?
- What are some artistic projects you're currently working on?

### Mujeres de Maiz

- What does MDM mean to you? [3 words of significance]
- Tell me about how you became involved with the collective.
- In 2011, is MDM the same collective of 1997? Why do you believe it's lasted 14 years?
- Can you discuss the spiritual aspect of MDM?
- How does MDM compare to other collectives you are (or have been) a part of?
- Tell me about your experiences at the live art show or other events in March, [What roles have you played, moments of significance, highlights, etc.?]
- What do you think draws people to MDM events?
- How does the MDM art show compare to other cultural events you've been to? Describe your first cultural event (festival/march/parade/etc.) or events that have significance for you, if any. What role do these events play in your life?
- What does it mean to be an Indigenous Xicana?
- How does MDM connect to a global Indigenous movement? What role does the Xican@ community play?
- Envisioning exercise: Imagine a future in a world that you shape. What does it look like?

**Appendix C. 14th Annual Mujeres De Maiz Live Art Show Evaluation Form**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Show** | EXCELLENT | ABOVE AVERAGE | FAIR | POOR | N/A |
| **Vendors** | EXCELLENT | ABOVE AVERAGE | FAIR | POOR | N/A |
| **Performers** | EXCELLENT | ABOVE AVERAGE | FAIR | POOR | N/A |
| **Speakers** | EXCELLENT | ABOVE AVERAGE | FAIR | POOR | N/A |

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFO**

Age: _____ Gender: _____ Sexuality: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____ Occupation: _____

How many MDM events have you attended including this one? _____

Do you plan to attend the event next year? _____

**Education Level (Please circle)** Primary school Junior High High School

Some college College degree Graduate/professional degree Self/Community taught

**What part of L.A. do you live in and if not L.A., where?** _____

**Where did you grow up?** _____

**How did you hear about the event? (Please circle)**

Flyer Radio Friend Newspaper Facebook MySpace Blog/Web

**Comments/testimony/suggestions (use back if needed)**

**On behalf of Mujeres de Maiz, Tlazocomatli, Gracias, Thank you.**

**OPTIONAL:** If you are interested in participating in an interview describing your experiences at the event(s) in further detail please complete the section below. You will be contacted within three months to schedule an interview.

Name _____ Email_____

Phone _____ Best time to contact _____

**Appendix D. Mujeres de Maiz Live Art Show Timeline (List compiled by Claudia Mercado)**

| Date | Event | Zine | Title | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| June 29, 1997 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #1 | Vol. 1 | Mujeres de Maiz: El Nacimiento del Dios de | Popular Resource Center, Highland Park |
| November 9, 1997 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #2 | Vol. 2 | Seeds of Resistance | Community Service Organization, Boyle Heights |
| March 8, 1998 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #3 | Vol. 3 | Of Mixed Waters | Community Service Organization, Boyle Heights |
| August 7, 1998 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #4 | n/a | Mujeres de Maiz: The Roots of Herstory | Popular Resource Center, Highland Park |
| Spring 1999 | Support & Collaboration | n/a | Cihuatlatokan | Angeles National Forest, CA |
| March 10, 2002 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #5 | n/a | Red | Casa Del Mexicano, Boyle Heights |
| March 5, 2004 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #6 | n/a | Danzando Con El Fuego | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 2006 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #7 | Vol. 4 | Toltecayotl Cihuatl | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 11, 2007 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #8 | Vol. 5 | Cantando Al Amanecer | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 8, 2008 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #9 | Vol. 6 | Somos Medicina | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 8, 2009 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #11 | Vol. 7 | La Sagrada | Metabolic Studios/Farmlab, Downtown |
| March 7, 2010 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #12 | Vol. 8 | 13 Baktun: Return of the Wisdom of Elders | The Paramount/Casa Grande, Boyle Heights |
| March 6, 2011 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #13 | Vol. 9 | Soldadera De Amor | The Paramount/Casa Grande, Boyle Heights |
| March 10, 2012 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #14 | Vol. 10 | Rites of Passage | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 10, 2013 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #15 | Vol. 11 | Identity Blinging | Self Help Graphics, East LA |
| March 9, 2014 | Live Art Show & Exhibit #16 | Vol. 12 | Ofrendas of the Flesh | The Vex, Alhambra |

**Appendix E. Sample Donation Solicitation Letter**

November 22, 2010

Dear community partner:

Hello and thank you for your interest in supporting **"The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious Fashion,"** a fashion event and cultural fair to benefit La Casa de La Raza. Founded in 1971 on the Eastside of Santa Barbara, La Casa de la Raza was created as a non-profit community center to develop and empower the Latino community by affirming and preserving the Latino cultural heritage, providing an umbrella of services and by advocating for participation in the larger community.

For the past few months, students in my Feminist Studies course at UC Santa Barbara have been learning about the importance of having access to a culturally relevant education and extracurricular programming, particularly with regards to youth. This is why we're partnering with Del Pueblo Café of Goleta to host a fundraiser to benefit youth programming at Casa de La Raza. Research and data suggest that one of the main factors that motivate youth to attend, succeed and eventually graduate from high school is extracurricular activities like sports and the arts. Yet these programs are exactly what continue to be underfunded, overlooked, and cut during an economic crisis like the one we are currently experiencing.

You are among a select group of generous, compassionate community members who have a unique opportunity to reach out to the Santa Barbara Latino community. With thousands of youth and families utilizing Casa de La Raza's services throughout the year, business and corporate partners have enjoyed excellent opportunities to reach large, diverse, and important sectors of the local community.

I urge you to consider making a donation in support of our fundraiser or directly to La Casa de La Raza towards youth programming (enclosed you will find a description of the youth programs that you may specifically support). Please feel free to contact me with any questions about our event or sponsorship opportunities. I can be reached at (XXX) XXX-7093 or XXXX@umail.ucsb.edu.

We look forward to your support,

Amber Rose González, M.A.
Department of Feminist Studies
University of California
Santa Barbara, CA 93106

**Appendix F. Sample Vendor Invitation and Application**

October 1, 2010

Dear Vendor,

My name is Amber Rose González and I'm currently teaching a class at UC Santa Barbara entitled "Indigenous Women Resisting Representation." The focus is on Native women artists and their forms of self- and community/tribal representation through literature, art, music, dance, theater and fashion. My students have been working very hard this quarter to put on a benefit fashion show and cultural fair titled: **"The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious Fashion"** as part of their final community service learning project. All proceeds from the event will benefit youth programming at Casa de La Raza. Founded in 1971 on the Eastside of Santa Barbara, La Casa de la Raza was created as a non-profit community center to develop and empower the Latino community by affirming and preserving the Latino cultural heritage, providing an umbrella of services and by advocating for participation in the larger community.

We invite you to participate as a vendor at our event on ***Thursday December 9th at 6:00pm Casa de la Raza***. If you are interested in reserving a vendor space, please complete the vendor application below and RSVP via phone or email as soon as possible. We are requesting an in-kind donation for our raffle and all funds collected will be donated directly to Casa de la Raza.

Sincerely,

Amber Rose González
Department of Feminist Studies
UC Santa Barbara
XXXX@umail.ucsb.edu
(XXX) XXX-7093

Dee Hamby
Vendor/Artist Liaison
(XXX) XXX-5458

**VENDOR APPLICATION**

The Good Red Road: Cultura Conscious Fashion
A Benefit Fashion Show & Cultural Fair

Thursday November 9, 2010
6:00 pm to 10:00 pm
La Casa De La Raza
601 East Montecito St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
www.lacasadelaraza.org

**CONTACT**
Amber Rose González
Event Organizer
Board Member, Casa de la Raza
XXX@umail.ucsb.edu
(XXX) XXX-7093

Thank you for your interest in vending at our cultural fair. Complete applications along with a photograph of items to be sold should be submitted by **Saturday October 15** to XXX@umail.ucsb.edu. Due to a limited number of available spaces, vendors are encouraged to return applications promptly. Vendors will be notified that their application was accepted by **October 25.**

**VENDOR BOOTH INFORMTATION**

- La Casa will provide one 6' conference table per vendor.
- The marketplace will be located in the main hall.
- Booths will be assigned prior to the day of the event.
- La Casa de la Raza is not responsible for any lost, stolen, or damaged items.

**DAY OF EVENT LOGISTICS**

- Vendors must arrive for check in and set up between 3:00 am and 4:00 pm.
- Booths must be completely set up by 5:30 pm.
- Please be considerate of space constraints as you set up your merchandise.
- Vendors are responsible for attending to their merchandise at all times.
- Doors open to the public at 6:00 pm and the event concludes at 10:00 pm.
- Vendors must stay until the end of the event.
- Breakdown and clean up should be complete by 11:30 pm.

**VENDOR (PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN)**

Name of vendor:

Name of business (if applicable):

Mailing Address:

Telephone Number: (  )

Email Address:

Description of items to be sold (remember to attach a photo with your application):